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A WILL AND A WAY.

BY

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"HIGH AND LOW,"
"A RIDE OVER THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS,"
&c., &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A WILL AND A WAY.

CHAPTER I.

It would have been an outrage on congruity to have subjoined the relation of the curate's adventure to a rhapsody, such as that which concludes our last chapter: moreover—whether to the purpose or not, critics have full permission to decide hereafter—we have a word to say touching Lady Derisley before we venture upon the fortunes of Mr. Small. Preparatory to these remarks let me observe, in self-defence, or rather as a warning to the aforesaid critics, that whatever points we may be induced to notice in her ladyship's character; our aim is not severity, but truth; and that we abhor and deprecate ill-nature as heartily as can the most amiable critic who ever crushed the prospects of a striving author.

Goethe used, we are told, to worm out of every man, who gave him the chance, a history of that man's life. "Tell me," said he "how you have lived, and I will tell you what you are." To comprehend Lady Derisley, a sketch of her past life ought to lend no slight aid. The early years of her education were spent on the continent; the finish, as it is called, was given to her accomplishments in her own country. For one in her grade the result would, perhaps, have been more favourable had this order of things been reversed. In France I have observed, that the children even of the high are pert, and that the little girls are coquettish, affected, and unnatural imitators of those whom the world has taught to be unnatural. On the other side, I have heard it said by some, specially cognisant in the matter, that the effect of London society upon young ladies who step into it from the virtuous restraint of the schoolroom is often vitiating to a degree which none but its habitual frequenters have the least conception of. But from every misfortune some advantage is to be derived. On the continent Lady Derisley had learned to speak

the languages of the north and south, not only with fluency and accuracy, but also with a correctness of accent which is never acquired, excepting in childhood. She had learned to sing grand Italian *scenas*, by especial favour, under the instructions of the accomplished Rubini. She could paint butterflies, make paper flowers, and embroider Spanish brigands to the life. In whatever ball-room she moved, none could "thread the mazy dance" like her. Her contre dance was as animated as it was graceful, her waltzing was as light as it was voluptuous. As for partners, she was engaged from first to last within five minutes of the time that she made her entrance.

When Sir Foy married her she was just twenty. Many were surprised that she had not married sooner. The fact is, society had more charms for her than domestic life. She received homage from scores of dashing dandies, platoons of ensigns, troops of cornets. Poor curates lived on parched peas and toast-and-water to cool their passion for her in the country. Bloated bankers and *blasé'd* peers gloated on her at champagne feasts in town; the marvel

was, she should ever have sacrificed such delights for the sake of one man. Indeed, it is possible she might never have done so had it not been for the importunity of her relations. But her foreign education had trained her to look upon marriage as a mere matter of social convenience, and never having had this theory dashed in pieces by even a transient sensation of the tender passion, she accepted Sir Foy as the best offer she had had, and consoled herself with the promise of great wealth, and the complete control of an old and doting husband.

Within the first three years of her wedded state Lady Derisley became the mother of two children. But remaining with even less regard for her husband after marriage than she had felt for him before it, the offspring of their union never engaged a morsel more of her affection than was purely instinctive, and this had gradually worn off as her children grew from the condition of helpless infancy to that of selfish maturity. Notwithstanding this carelessness of her domestic ties, she was kept by them pretty much at home, until Allan was packed off to school, and Belinda was old enough to travel abroad; and

by the time their daughter was of an age to be brought out Lady Derisley had established herself in a town residence, and was once more in the full enjoyment of the sweets of London seasons.

Lady Derisley was not a happy woman. How could she be? No one expected the matron of three-and-forty, and the mother of two grown-up children to sing grand Italian *scenas;* the voice grows thin, too, about this epoch of life; the manufacture of paper flowers is an occupation that loses some of its excitement in the course of thirty years' practice; even butterflies, if imitated to the velvetty down of their wings, cease to astonish beholders when a life has been spent in perfecting the art of imitation; and Spanish brigands become very worstedy when threadbaring time has divested them of the fluff of romance. Lady Derisley was not endowed with the great trust of a *ten-talent* heart. But lives there, or ever did there live, one of God's creatures with an aorta system in its body, save toads and scorpions, who was not as a pulsating being compelled —ay! compelled to love something, or be

unhappy? Lady Derisley loved nothing; so she drove in the Park, went to operas, spent hundreds on millinery, lay listlessly on sofas, and skimmed every new novel that was published in the year.

The dotage of Sir Foy increased with age; in his admiration for his wife he was childish. But he hated London, and barring some half-dozen trips which he made thither in the course of the season, scarcely saw her, excepting for a few months in the winter.

Leaving to any commentator, who will kindly undertake it, the task of explaining this digression (it cannot otherwise be denominated) we will now turn to Mr. Small, whose adventure may be told in a brace of paragraphs.

It was one night when all the inmates of the hall had retired to rest that the curate, for some purpose or other, unknown to the writer of this history, rose from his bed, left his apartment, which was an attic on the upper story, and descended the staircase to the floor beneath him. The staircase by which Mr. Small made his descent was built of wood; and although he took every precaution to make no sound, the old wooden steps creaked

with a noise that seemed to echo from every part of that wing. His slippers, too, which he wore down at heel, slapped the polished oak in spite of every care he took to walk without disturbance. Mr. Small was not naturally superstitious—he was no coward—in daylight he was as fearless as a lion. But there was an old story current in the Derisley family that the part of the house which he slept in was haunted. Of course Allan and others had made the most of this story; and if Small treated their tales with contempt it was not without a proper remembrance of the apparitions mentioned in holy writ, guarding himself from despising the idea of supernatural appearances, lest at any time his hardiness should be punished by a visitation. Now, whether it was from any apprehensions of meeting with a spectre at this moment, or whether it was from fear of rousing the slumberers on the next floor, or whether it was from some other mysterious cause beyond our ken, it would be frivolous to debate; but, to judge by the contortions on the poor man's face, both terror and pain were strongly depicted there. Each step that he advanced

his feet came to the ground as though he had been treading, as some one has expressed it, upon his own eye-balls. When he reached the first floor his way lay through a succession of turning passages which brought him out into a long gallery with ancient tapestry. Not an inch did he advance without thrusting his candle before him, that he might have full warning of any being, ghostly or bodily, which might by accident be in his path.

To account for this exceeding timidity it is only fair to say, that Mr. Small had no covering on but his shirt, and the aforementioned slippers. For as it is the custom of travellers at inns, who have no servants of their own, to place their dirty shoes outside their doors over night, so our curate was in the habit of placing all his clothes on a chair in the passage, that they might be brushed, and ready for his early rising the next morning. This proceeding was the more necessary with him, for black being the colour of his apparel for both morning and evening dress, he never burdened himself with more than one suit of clothes—his best—when he left home to visit his neighbours. The servants in Sir Foy's

establishment then, having the same objection to early hours which is shared by their fellows in all other establishments, preferred folding up the gentleman's garments, ere going to bed, to giving themselves that trouble in the morning; and, for this reason, when Small was seized with the uneasiness ("The motive for continuing in the same state or action," says Locke, "is only the present satisfaction in it; the motive to change is always some *uneasiness*,") which induced him to go down stairs, he looked for those garments which, in civilized society, are only dispensed with in the cold climates of the north; but naturally found them not. No wonder, therefore, that his apprehension of meeting any second person should be great; and less wonder that he should shiver and tremble when cold attacked his limbs as well as fear.

It has ever been an open question to decide upon the validity of presentiments. In this instance they were destined to be verified. Small had scarcely entered the long gallery when a sudden gust of wind extinguished his candle. This accident was enough in itself to produce the most serious consequence upon one wrought to

so high a pitch of nervousness. Yet, what was his horror when he discovered the puff of air to come from an aperture in the tapestry which opened to disclose a figure dressed in white from head to foot. The terrified curate stood rooted to the spot; he neither moved nor uttered; and as he gazed with hair on end, the figure with its face turned from him paced slowly along the gallery, and entering a passage that turned to one side disappeared from his sight.

Well would it have been for all parties had the matter rested here. But whereas we never before knew anything to come of a ghostly apparition, in this instance the consequences were most serious. At first Mr. Small suffered all the terrors incident to such a trying position; and what occurred to the great king of Babylon also occurred to him; 'the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.' But no sooner had the apparition vanished than Small's presence of mind returned to him; and reflecting that without a light the dangers of his situation would only be augmented by his remaining where he was, he kicked off

his slippers, and dashed onwards, with bare feet, in pursuit of the retreating figure; so swift and so noiseless were his movements, and so nerved was he by the sudden resolution to solve the mystery, that the ghost heeded not his presence till it was in the act of opening a chamber-door, and the hand of Small had seized the white robe in which it was enveloped. With the rapidity of lightning it turned full upon him; its deadly pale features confronted his for a moment; its eyes seemed starting from their sockets, as they glanced with an expression of horror at his gaunt uncovered limbs; and with one wild scream, which penetrated to the uttermost corners of the spacious house, it darted into the open chamber, leaving him no longer awe-struck at the notion of a spirit —but bewildered—and covered with confusion and shame for the dreadful shock he had given to the nerves of—the horrified Lady Derisley! Whither to turn he knew no more than a blind man. But ere he had groped his way in the obscurity, for many minutes, noises and the glimmering of lights warned him that her ladyship's cry had alarmed the household, who were now hastening in his direction to

learn whence and wherefore it had been raised. His own forlorn state had impressed itself anew upon his mind. To be found such a figure at such a crisis was a misfortune to be avoided at all hazards; his natural sense of delicacy conjured up the chance of some of the female portion of the community turning out, till the thought nearly drove him to distraction; and as the lights advanced, he had only time to notice the figure of an armed man, whom he took for Mr. Harrod, senior, issuing from a spot in the gallery where he now perceived there was a doorway; when he staggered on till his outstretched hands pressed against another door which, as it yielded to his touch, he pushed open, and gladly entered in hope of refuge.

Poor Small! I pity thee when I think of the succession of misfortunes which befell thee on that eventful night. Yet, how natural and consequent was each link in the chain of the adventures; and how frequently we blame the severe decrees of destiny, when in truth ignorance, carelessness, or inadvertency hurry us along from one calamity to another.

Scarcely had the first exultation for his good

fortune sprung from his grateful heart, ere a yell more piercing than her mother's, burst from the shrill pipes of Miss Belinda's throat. Miss Derisley's apartment was only separated by a small passage from her ladyship's; hearing the scream her first impulse was to rush either to rescue or to seek the protection of her mama. With this intent she had unlocked her door, and stood listening to catch any sound that might warn her against crossing from one chamber to the other. It was thus that Small found her door ajar; and trusting that this would only have happened in an untenanted apartment, he, without hesitation, sought therein a harbour from the coming storm. His situation now grew more desperate than ever. The continuous and hysterical screams of the young lady brought the alarmed household with hasty strides to the spot. Every prospect of escape was cut off from without. In this dilemma he found his way to a closet where Miss Derisley kept her dresses, and had just shut himself up as the voice of Mr. Harrod, and those of two men servants reached him, in conjunction with the faint accents of Miss Belinda. But

these last he could scarcely detect, though his ears were strained like the auricular organs of a hunted hare; for Miss Derisley had, on the arrival of the men, buried herself in the bed-clothes, and was now straining her lungs almost to suffocation, with her head actually entombed under a mountain of pillows. A search was at once instigated; but luckily for Small in one respect, and most unhappily for him in another, he was not discovered until he had completely disguised himself in the gowns, shawls, and bonnets of the young lady. The instant the closet door was opened, the curate darted past the astonished servants; unable to force his way without disclosing his features, he held his head down while all three men cudgelled him about the shoulders as though there had been merit in thus valorously attacking one defenceless being. At last the poor victim, no longer able to stand the beating, cried out, in his well known voice. "Tuff! tuff! What I mean is, break my head," and suddenly throwing himself in a new attitude, he fetched Mr. Harrod a blow on the mouth which deprived that gentleman of the only front tooth he had left, and stretched him at

full length upon the floor. Such a declaration of his identity at once relieved Small from the attack of the two servants; and after an explanation, which was soon made, to the entire satisfaction of every one but Mr. Harrod, the house was once more restored to tranquillity, and its inmates to repose.

CHAPTER II.

In every history which records the facts of real life, a number of events must occur simultaneously which no author, unless he were like one of those conjurors who keep half a dozen balls in the air at one time, can treat of but in rotation. It consequently falls out, that in directing the reader's attention to one set of objects every author has to withdraw it from another. This—now that it is mentioned—we conceive to be so self-evident a proposition that without more ado we shall change the scene at once from Carrol Hall to Nordefall Priory.

One circumstance which took place there about the same time Harrod and his son left home, was the ejectment of the family of Sandfords from the Nordefall Lodge.

The news of this event was brought to Carrol by Lord Granstein, on his return from a visit he had been making at the Priory. The cause of the trouble was this. A silver

spoon belonging to Mr. Sigismond had been discovered at the lodge, and so many things of value had lately been missed that suspicion, taking its direction from the accident of the spoon, never rested in Mr. Sigismond's mind till it had induced him to turn the whole family away without leaving them any means for future subsistence. We cannot now stop to dwell upon the sufferings that this summary proceeding of Mr. Sigismond's was sure to entail upon, at least, one honest man; inasmuch as it has here to be related what course Mr. Harrod pursued after the declaration his son had made to persist in winning Meriel. It was stated that Harrod indulged himself in a pretty confident assurance that his threats to disinherit Fabian would have the effect he desired. But where his own interest was at stake he was too energetic, and too wise a man to leave anything to mere chance. By way, therefore, of strengthening the barrier he had set up, by menace, and by ridicule against his own son, he determined, if possible, to make the matter doubly sure by working on the credulity and impulsiveness of Mr. Sigismond. With this

design in view—it being the day before that appointed for the village fete—Mr. Harrod set out for the Priory, and opportunely encountered Mr. Sigismond coming along the high road. After the usual compliments had been interchanged, Mr. Harrod opened the matter directly, by intimating that the object of his visit was to confer with Mr. Sigismond upon a question which gravely affected them both. Mr. Sigismond was so perfect a gentleman, he never permitted his manner, if it was within control, to express the displeasure which a disagreeable communication gave him. So great, however, was his aversion to Harrod, that it cost him no slight effort to assure that gentleman he should listen with pleasure to anything he had to impart.

Upon this Harrod began by saying, "It was not so much on his own account he had come, as out of concern for Miss Sigismond."

"I am sure," returned Mr. Sigismond, "my daughter is very much indebted to you; but I cannot conceive what it is you have to say about her."

"Only," replied Mr. Harrod, "as Fabian's father, I felt it was my duty, if possible, to

interfere where my own son is so much to blame."

"To blame!" cried Mr. Sigismond; "and pray, sir, for what?"

"Is it possible, Mr. Sigismond," returned the other, "you can be in ignorance of the interest—I forbear to employ a stronger word—the interest, I say, which my boy has unfortunately created for himself in Meriel's mind?"

"How, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Sigismond, his face growing crimson in a minute; "you pretend that Miss Sigismond has ever for an instant felt an interest in your son different from what she entertains for any other acquaintance? Pardon my saying so, Mr. Harrod, but you must be egregiously mistaken!"

"My dear Mr. Sigismond, I hope, with all my heart, that I may be mistaken. But if it prove as, alas! I apprehend it will, that my fears are but too well grounded, I must intreat you not to blame your daughter; for notwithstanding I am Fabian's father, I cannot conceal from myself the unfortunate habit he has fallen into of philandering with every woman he comes across; and though I frequently

caution him against the immorality of inconstancy and of trifling, one might as well hope to melt the north pole with warm breath, as try to cool young blood with the calm voice of reason. Believe me, sir, the foolish boy has flirted with Miss Sigismond till she is in danger of losing her heart to him."

"Really Mr. Harrod," returned the other, with signs of increasing impatience, "I profess myself obliged to you for this interference, and when I perceive the danger you are so good as to caution me against, I trust I shall not fail to avert it."

With this Mr. Sigismond turned his horse's head to re-enter his park gate. Mr. Harrod had not yet done with him.

"I see, sir," said he, "I see you attach little weight to the warning I have presumed to give you. But I cannot, even at the risk of forfeiting your good opinion, suffer you to leave me in this sceptical spirit; and since it appears you discredit me entirely, I must now tell you that I have positive proof that your daughter is in love with my son."

"Positive proof that my daughter loves the son of—of Mr. Harrod! I do not ap-

preciate the motive you may have for such an assertion. I can only say that I—that you—that the thing is impossible!"

"Well, then, sir, I have it from my son's lips."

"Then by —— your son is as much deceived as you, sir."

"That you should scorn the notion of your daughter's preference for my son, Mr. Sigismond, is perhaps not very flattering to me."

"But, sir," interrupted Mr. Sigismond haughtily, "I always understood that your son was the affianced husband of Miss Derisley. My daughter has known this as well as I, and I trust, sir, my child would sooner pine to death with the secret agonies of a broken heart than conceive in her wildest imagination that the sacred bonds of a pledged word could ever be broken."

"Mr. Sigismond, I cannot tell you how it rejoices me to hear you speak thus. Yet, nevertheless, in a case of this kind, where young hearts are concerned, it is, I feel, my duty to spare not even my own son in guarding him from a dishonourable action. It is he—he it is, sir—not your daughter—whom we must beware

of; you have no conception what a rake the fellow is, and like many other young sparks he would think it, I'll be bound, a spirited and manly thing to win the heart of a girl, even should it afterwards be at the cost of her happiness, ay! or involve her very ruin."

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Sigismond, raising his eyes in pious horror; "can there be such villains to blast the fairest images of this fair earth?"

"Ah! sir," sighed Mr. Harrod, "you little know how much wickedness there is in this world. The heart of man is full of deceit! Like the ancients who decked their sacrifices with garlands, and with flowers, treachery loads with adulation the victim it destines for its prey. No, I cannot answer for Fabian's intentions. I am sorry to say I have heard too many stories of his ardent passions carrying him beyond the bounds of discretion, nay, I should say of honour! And whatever may be the actual state of the case, I intreat you, for your child's sake, to put her upon her guard."

The two gentlemen having here reached the entrance to the Priory, Mr. Harrod shook Mr.

Sigismond warmly by the hand, and therewith took his leave.

In spite of the forcible manner in which Harrod had urged his point, Mr. Sigismond could not bring himself to believe there was much to be feared, at all events, from the condition of Meriel's mind. Being, too, of a nature which shrunk from all disagreeable scenes, and distressing explanations such as called for firmness of action, or for admonition calculated to wound the feelings of others, he hesitated a little whether he should dismiss the matter from his thoughts, as he generally did, with whatever annoyed him, by resorting to his pallet and his canvass; but finding the doubt troublesome to get rid of, he summoned Meriel to his *studio*, and there entered with her into the following conversation.

"Well, puss, dear!" such was the familiar style in which Miss Sigismond addressed her parent; "did you send for me? I thought you had just gone out riding."

When Meriel had said this much she bestowed upon the old gentleman that tender embrace which she never forgot to welcome

him with, even after so short an absence as this had been.

"Meriel, my child," began Mr. Sigismond, with an embarrassed manner and shaking voice, "I have something to say which may offend you; but if it do so you must forgive me."

"Offend me? Why, you darling! you could not offend anybody, much less me, if you tried." Here she again pressed to his bald head the sweetest pair of lips that ever were parted with a kiss."

"I have been riding with—that is," stammered Mr. Sigismond, "I met Mr. Harrod coming to call on me as I was setting out."

At the mention of this name all the colour fled from Meriel's cheeks, and her heart began to leap up to her very throat; from the attitude of attention she had just assumed, she now commenced arranging a table by her side; and turning her head as if interest was at an end, simply replied, in a tone which said, I hear you, "Yes, dear!"

"He said," continued Mr. Sigismond, "that he had come to see me about something which concerned both him and me." Mr. Sigismond paused.

"Oh! did he, dear?" replied Meriel, deranging the books she had just been putting straight.

"And he went on to say that it also concerned you."

"Me!" cried Meriel, letting fall a large china pallet with a start. "What! how concern me, I should like to know?"

"Never mind the pallet," said Mr. Sigismond, recovering his courage at the evidence of Meriel's safety and innocence. "And what do you think he had the impertinence to insinuate?"

"What?"

"Why! that you were in love with his son."

"Oh, gracious me! how could he say such a thing?"

"How, indeed! But truly he almost succeeded in alarming me, for he insisted upon it that you had been caught by the attentions which he was persuaded his son had been paying you."

"Why, dearest father! you know Fabian Harrod is engaged to marry Belinda Derisley. What, therefore, could make his father fancy he cared for me?"

"Because the young gentleman (if he be worthy of such a style) is—so it appears—in the habit of flirting with every girl he meets."

"Did his father say that?" inquired Miss Sigismond, in a tremulous voice.

"He not only assured me such was his character, but, to his shame, confessed that his son was a trifler of the worst description."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Meriel, who was now as pale as death.

"Yes," pursued her parent; "and I am only rejoiced to find the scoundrel has not woven his snares about your heart, my child; for his father alluded to such instances of his treachery, that when he had informed me he had it from his son's own lips, that he boasted of having made a conquest of your heart—Good God!" cried Mr. Sigismond, jumping up to support the poor girl, who had fainted straight away at this unexpected blow. "Meriel, my child, what has happened? Here! Help—help! Water, I say! Oh! she's lost! she's lost! I see it all now! The wretch! The double-faced villian! This comes of suffering the intimacy of such rogues as Harrod. How could it be otherwise? It's

my own fault. Yes, yes! it's all my fault. He's broken her heart. I know he's broken her heart; and I—I, wretched man—am to blame for it all!"

While Mr. Sigismond was wringing his hands, a picture of the dismalest woe, and before the servants had answered his summons for assistance, Meriel again came to herself. It is impossible that, under the circumstances, she could have behaved better than she did; by which I do not mean to assert she fainted out of hand to suit the occasion, as many innocent creatures might, and I am sure would have done in her place; but that no behaviour could have been more natural, or more judicious than was her's; she recovered her senses exactly at the right moment, and bidding her father dismiss the housekeeper, who had just arrived with cordials, she locked the door, and seated herself in silence to collect her bewildered and much shocked senses.

"Yes, father!" she began, in answer to his tender inquiries, "I am well—quite well now—and after what has passed, I will no longer attempt to hide from you the truth, which accident

has forced me to reveal. I own that despite the evil consequences which threatened to reward me; despite the wickedness I now see myself to have been guilty of, in giving place to feelings which I dared scarcely confess even to myself, Mr. Harrod was not indifferent to me. But the punishment of Heaven is most just; and from this time forth my own free will shall choose that line of conduct which best accords with the duty I owe to my father."

The dignity of manner with which the young lady delivered herself of this speech did not hinder the affectionate embrace which Mr. Sigismond immediately bestowed upon her.

"Ah!" cried the old gentleman, clasping her to his bosom, "who could be so inhuman as to trifle with a heart like thine, my child. Do not weep at the thought of one so worthless. The villain! Would that his life's blood might atone for every tear he costs thee."

"Father," returned Meriel, "do not think to comfort me by accusing him; for even if any one were to blame but myself, which is not the

case, it would be only more mortifying to be forced to believe that what I had accepted as regard and admiration were, after all, the snares by which deceit practised on my credulity—if what you have told me of him be true—"

"If," interrupted the other, catching alarm at something in the tone of her voice, as she spoke this last sentence, "if it be true! How can it be otherwise than true? Think of the stock he comes of! Why expect from one not born a gentleman the chivalrous sentiments of honour which birth alone inherits. Even suppose for an instant that he really loved you, my child; what could he hope from the indulgence of such a passion? Did he think that I, knowing his hand to be pledged elsewhere, would be accessory to the breaking of an engagement. No, my child! he winked at the baseness of his own designs, but he could not have forgotten the first principles of the highest code of honour."

"Whatever were his intentions," said she, "I repeat that I alone have been to blame; and now I must beg, dearest, that you will never make further allusions to the subject. If you will promise me this, I, on the other

hand, will promise to be the most dutiful of daughters. Cease to distress yourself on my account, for if anything could make me miserable it would be to think myself the cause of anxiety to you; you need have no apprehension about my behaviour, for whatever may be the case with my heart, my conduct, at least, is under my control; and if heretofore my simplicity has deceived me, my pride in future shall meet and refute the boast that I was made a dupe of."

Fortified with this spirited self-reliance, Meriel went off to her own room, there to reflect upon the disclosure which had so surprised her. The presence of a witness to our misfortunes so often produces a fictitious courage to support them heroically, that it is little to be wondered at that Meriel, when alone, took a totally different view of her lover's conduct and her own condition from what Mr. Sigismond believed and hoped she really had of them. Her first admission to herself was: "I little knew how deeply I loved him; and I fear that when the first warmth of my indignation has cooled, and a few days have left me without a hope in the world, it will

then be that I shall begin to feel the pangs of a loss which I am yet too much stunned and bewildered justly to appreciate." From this she indulged in the specious consolation of questioning the truth of the offending statement. This led her on to weigh its probability by a general review of Fabian's character; no satisfactory conclusion, however, could she come to concerning that, for every thought of it showed her how by long habit she had grown to hold him in such high esteem, that no suspicion of his honesty could find admittance for a moment. Then she set herself to a rigid and impartial consideration of all his actions. Any one might see how this would only be adding fuel to the flame; yet, so agreeable, or rather so seductive, was this occupation, she spent several whole hours in conning over first the incidents in succession—then taken separately—then in their bearing one upon another—till some particular one suggesting a doubt, she would toss, and knead, and beat it about till it lost its original form, and took any shape that chance might give. To the relief of such doubts some remembrance would follow, which had

comfort enough in it to leaven all the sour dough, converting the whole into sweet bread. So it was that a regular spring-tide of hope flowed in correspondence with the neap-tide. But this again was followed by reaction. For, what though her lover should turn out never so true, was there not now another painful consideration which, in respect of its having no uncertainty about it, was even more distressing than the charges against Fabian? Her father's unqualified disapproval of their attachment under all events whatsoever; together with the promise she had made him to break with Mr. Harrod seemed, whether she wished it or no, so completely to make an end to the whole affair that whether Fabian were as true as the patriarch Jacob, or false as Cupid himself, no longer signified a straw—he was lost to her from this day forth for ever.

There was, of course, nothing left for her but to shed a flood of the bitterest tears at this dreadful conclusion. Could the most unfeeling wretch in the whole world have seen her at this time sobbing as if her heart would burst with grief, he must, in spite of himself, have been filled with compassion, and have had only one desire, namely, to have consoled her by all the means

in his power. But neither was there any one to comfort her at hand, nor, had there been, could she from such an one have derived that consolation which she presently did from the only source whence lasting solace can ever come. In the very paroxysms of her sorrow she appealed to heaven for strength and help: she sought pardon from the Great Being who never inflicts a wound but to cure some disease. In her humility she did not deprecate the chastisement which she must still continue to deserve; but prayed that it might render her more worthy of the Divine Love which manifested itself in this fatherly correction. So perfect was her faith, and so unbounded her reliance in God's love and wisdom, that by complete acquiescence in what she looked upon as His will, she soon felt not only relieved from her late turbulent state, but imbued with calmness of mind; which, when mingled with her gratitude for it, ended in that joy which is perhaps the most innocent we poor creatures are ever permitted to feel. What trial this happiness was destined to undergo, remains to be seen in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

Two days after the above-mentioned crisis was the day appointed for the celebration of the village festival. The weather was bright and warm, and already betimes in the morning every thing had been got in readiness for the approaching games. Strolling companies, such as earn their livelihood by attending fairs, had drawn up their waggons on the green. Here was to be seen a roundabout, as those machines are called on which young people ride wooden horses swung round in the air, here a peep-show, a waggon full of prodigies and abortions, fancy gingerbread stalls, and targets to be shot at for nuts. In the centre of the green, and precisely in front of the "Mitre," that being the sign of the village public-house, stood a high pole, smooth and greased. Its summit was decorated with garlands, whereon were suspended a purse containing twenty

shillings and a silver watch—the prizes of any two climbers whose agility could surmount the impediments of tallow and position. Knots of young men prepared, as was evident by their dress, to contend in the sports, sauntered up and down the grass-plot; now playing upon each other some practical joke, which, notwithstanding the roughness of it, never failed to call forth shouts of most good-natured merriment; now bandying compliments with the bold, or twitting the coyer, lasses, all whose gay ribands and rosy cheeks added not a little to the cheerful brightness of the scene. On benches in front of the tavern doors sat some half a dozen village gossips, with long pipes in mouth, and some, such as the butcher, our host himself, and one or two of his boonest companions, were counteracting the soothing narcotic of tobacco by the stimulating effects of the foaming jug.

Against the roots of an enormous elm, whose thin and fast-decaying foliage gave it still more the venerable aspect of the presiding genius of the place, leaned our friend the mole-catcher; a small bull-terrier of the purest breed sat watching at his feet: the conversa-

tion ran upon the chances of the favorites; one, it was settled, had the most likelihood of climbing the greasy-pole; another had had most experience in sack-racing; a third could make a donkey gallop faster than any man in the country; a fourth had a hand that would grip a pig's tail till pig pulled up, or tail pulled off. About each candidate, there was sufficient difference of opinion to cause much wrangling, and the laying of small wagers.

In these discussions Davy took no part, unless when referred to, as he occasionally was; for Davy was respected as an oracle of most Delphic infallibility; and, as often happens, his silence frequently procured to him credit for wisdom, that nothing but his silence really entitled him to. An accident soon occurred however, which put a stop to his mute observation. Isaac Sandford, who probably had neglected his duty under the plea of this being a general holiday, came and seated himself at a small table under the tree close by where Davy stood. It being now about noon-time, Isaac began to feel hungry, but for this emergency he had previously prepared

himself, to avoid tavern expenses at the "Mitre," by bringing in his pocket a package of beef sandwiches. This package he now drew forth, and laying it open upon the table commenced very leisurely to eat his luncheon. The act did not pass unobserved by the host, with whom Isaac was already no favorite; consequently, some under-breath comments were made, which Isaac fully took the meaning of, but had not the face to reply to. Now Davy seeing Isaac at a disadvantage, and reflecting that his bull-terrier had not been fed that day, perceived a probability of Isaac's sacrificing a sandwich or two as an expiatory offering to public favor. The dog had already taken up a beseeching attitude in front of the footman, which Isaac observed with a jealous eye before Davy called his attention to it.

"He'll stand on his nose or on the tip of his tail," said the mole-catcher, "when he's in the mind. But I aint wery sure whether sandwiches 'll do it. Excuse me" added he, taking one of the nicely-prepared morsels from the paper. "Ham I thinks by the smell. No, 'tis beef—I arn't sure, neither. Which be it Mr. Isaac?"

"You'll know when you've ate it," returned the footman, somewhat surlily.

"There now!" replied David, indignantly, throwing the meat to the dog. "Aint that ungrateful! I wants to make that gifted animal perform for his amusement, and he excuses me personally. Bless yer heart!" said Toby, as with the utmost gravity and deliberation he picked up another sandwich, which he held over the dog's nose, "I'm like a young woodcock, I never touches nothing but spoon wictuals, there's a foot and a half atwixt every one of my grinders. Now Peter, head down, tail up, show the gentleman how we finds the moles." "He don't seem in a larned humour this morning," remarked the landlord of the "Mitre." "He is took with them modest fits sometimes" said Toby. "Mayhap though he'll come round presently. I han't rightly noticed if so be he likes beef. H'm! he 'pear to ralish it don't he? Well, there now! I never see a dog take kinder to sandwiches in my life. Look at un! look! Ha! ha! There! Well, now! may the Lord bless me, but if Peter ben't fond of bread and meat, I never see the dog as was!"

"D—n your blood!" said Isaac, as Davy in his mounting enthusiasm cast the remnant of the luncheon to his famished terrier. "Next time you wants to fill the belly of that half-starved gutter-licker, I should recommend you to do it at your own expense."

"Well! Mr. Isaac," returned the mole-catcher, "if I had known you would have taken on so about a paltry crumb or two, the dog should have starved before he touched the dirty food. Indeed! if you value it so much as that comes to, I wouldn't say if Peter's throat was well tickled, but every one might have his own again. Truth is, when I considered how near you was to the "Mitre" Mr. Isaac," here Davy cast a side-long glance in the direction of our host and his companions, "I fancied you couldn't want for a luncheon. As to my Peter there being a gutter-licker Mr. Isaac, I know nothing of your London lingo, but I suppose you get such terms from living amongst the gutters yourself."

"If you intend" said the footman, "to put any of your vulgar insults upon me fellow, I 'espise you as beneath the condesenshum of a gentleman, and I shall not bemean myself by

taking further notice of one in your humble station."

"An its come to that friend," said the other, "what though you have the advantage of exposing your spindle shanks to a London audience; for the matter of parentage and education I will back Peter against you any day."

"I'll tell you what" cried Isaac, whose bile now suffused his face, "if you giee me any more of your —— cheek, I'll break your —— head, and teach you to use a little genteeler language."

"I see," said Davy, "your's has the London polish. But touching humble stations, Mr. Isaac," here Davy lowered his voice—"though I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth, I did not make up for the defect by putting one into my pocket." In reply to this the footman sprang forward to aim his fist at Davy's head. But the mole-catcher nimbly jumped on one side and thus evaded the blow.

In all likelihood the quarrel would now have taken a more serious turn, had not a

general commotion announced the arrival of Sir Foy's party from the Hall, closely followed by Mr. Sigismond's pony-carriage containing the old gentleman, Meriel, and Lady Fitzjohn. The young men, viz., Lord Granstein, Mr. Derisley, and Fabian were on horseback; and as the Sigismond's pony-carriage drove on to the green, Allan and Lord Granstein at once rode to the side of it, and shaking hands with Meriel and her father, engaged them both in conversation. Fabian kept aloof till Allan, disgusted with the preference he imagined Miss Sigismond showed to Lord Granstein, left one side of the carriage vacant; he then walked his horse over to the spot, and made his bow to all three, so to speak, at once. This salute was as formally acknowledged as it had been formally made. Mr. Sigismond lifted his hat at least half a foot from his head, Meriel's demeanor was the most grave and dignified he had ever seen it; but the instant her bow was completed, she smiled with unusual vivacity and replied with unusual animation to the remarks of Lord Granstein. Lady Fitzjohn was the only one whose manners

betrayed any symptom of cordiality. But like Cynthia of antiquity

Turbavit nitidos extinctus passer ocellos.

A sparrow's death would at any time have disturbed the brightness of this good creature's eyes, and where love was the only offence she knew Fabian to be guilty of, it was not likely she could withhold her sympathy for what he had to suffer on that account. In the boldest defiance, therefore, of Mr. Sigismond's prejudice, she reached forth her hand, and gave the young man a much heartier recognition than he generally got from her. A very small quantity of encouragement suffices to exalt a lover's hopes, just as the least possible coldness will freeze and wither them in a moment. Fabian, moreover, as we have often observed, was by no means fanciful; he was, too, of that happy disposition which enables its owner to see things pretty much as they exist, so that albeit he was somewhat taken aback and even cast down by the reception the others had given him, Lady Fitzjohn, whom he knew to be Meriel's *confidante*, released him from his first apprehensions; and he simply accounted

for Meriel's manner by one of those fits of coyness which he had so often known her to put on. Ten-fold more self-possessed then than she was, he brought his horse to her side of the carriage, and with great freedom commenced that sweet banter which is a thousand times dearer to lovers than the finest frenzy to poets or the deepest wisdom to philosophers. Meriel, poor thing, was inexpressibly troubled how to behave, and Mr. Sigismond became doubly convinced of the trifling spirit of the young man. By degrees, the serious and painful restraint which Meriel's manner betrayed, brought Fabian, in spite of his equanimity, to feel that something had happened unfavourable to himself. He had far too much delicacy and good sense to press his suit at an inauspicious moment, and easily found an excuse to leave the pony-carriage without showing, for he did not feel it, any huffiness or embarrassment.

By this time all were impatient to begin the sports. Yet, ere starting with them, the villagers insisted on choosing an umpire to declare the champion of each game. By unanimous acclaim this office was graciously

offered to, and as prettily accepted by, Miss Sigismond.

Loud and long were the shouts of laughter which attended the repeated failures of those who, with infinite labour, reached almost to the top of the greasy pole only to slip down in a hundredth part of the time it had cost them to climb it. Great was the merriment at the tumbles one and all got at the jumping in sacks. The blindfold runners of the wheelbarrows afforded, too, their share of amusement. So did the boys who bobbed for sixpences in tubs of treacle, and all-besmeared as they were, plunged headlong into baskets of feathers. The whole place rang with one continuous noise of merriment. Trumpets, drums, and fiddles made up the concert, and even the heavy hearts (alas! let a dozen of us be taken, where you will, among them must these be found!) now almost forgot their own sorrow at the sight of so many happy faces. The decisions of Miss Sigismond, where a dispute was to be settled, gave, without a single exception, the most perfect satisfaction. None could be better fitted than herself for the office she filled; for, to an unhesitating and reso-

lute judgment, she united a gentleness and tact which left the loser almost as well pleased with himself as if the arbitration had been in his favour, and more than once honest hinds contended for no other object than for the privilege of appealing to this sweet impersonator of justice.

As the day advanced, the villagers eagerly pressed the young gentlemen to join in their sports, at least in those where agility rather than roughness would prevail. After a certain show of bashfulness which, we can answer for it, would never have deterred Fabian but for the thoughts of one witness then present, it was agreed they should enter for the grand foot race; which was open to a vast number who possessed no skill in other performances. Before the heat was to be run, one other entertainment had yet to take place. This was the catching of a large boar pig by his tail, which member, together with the whole carcase, though this it was contrary to the laws of the sport to lay hold of the latter, was greased all over, as had been the Maypole. Now Allan, more mischievously inclined than ever, perhaps on account of his little success

with Miss Sigismond, bethought him continually in what way he should bring Small into disgrace, who, all this while had been following Miss Belinda about, devoted to her in the last degree. At the sight of the slippery pig, and in consequence of the invitation he and his companions had just received to join in the games, it occurred to Allan that could the curate be persuaded to give chase to this animal, much entertainment might be derived therefrom. Small, as probably has been told before, was gifted by nature with a considerable amount of combativeness. By this, if not mistaken in the term, we conceive phrenologists to mean not only a propensity to quarrel with persons, but also a disposition to contend with difficulties. Be that as it may, the curate's pupils frequently availed themselves of his oppositiousness to carry their point, unknown to Mr. Small. By this artifice, and by a cunning incitement of the poor fellow's vanity, Allan now attempted to accomplish his design. He just represented to Mr. Small that to win this prize was the great feat of the day, that had he (Allan Derisley) half his (Small's) activity and strength, the

pig-chase, and not the race-course would have been the test of his manly powers. "But," said he, "even you, Mr. Small, would have no chance in contending with these louts. If they got a kick on the shins it would not bruise them; whereas, it might lame you for life, there is danger—real danger in the service. Then, see what hands they have! yours are strong, I admit, but while one pig's tail would slip through your fingers a hundred times, they would pull a hundred tails out by the roots. Still," he added, "it is a noble sport, and one that will cover with laurels any man who may engage in it." "Tuff! tuff!" cried Small, innocently jumping into the trap thus transparently laid for him, while his heart leapt at the thought of glorifying himself in the eyes of his adored mistress, "Tuff! tuff! what I mean is perhaps catch pig quicker than any body else. Suppose you a little let me try now." "Oh!" cried Miss Belinda, casting upon the curate a more fascinating and bewitching leer than she scarcely ever had done in her life before, (Belinda it must be observed, was plagued to death by the presence of Small, for the whole of her affections

happened this day to be centered in Lord Granstein, from whom her eyes were scarcely ever removed,) "Oh!" cried she, "I'm sure Mr. Small you would have as good a chance of gaining the prize as any one else. I should immensely like to see you try." This encouragement soon made up the curate's mind, so whipping off his coat, the pig was hardly loosed, ere Small's gaunt form was seen every where in the thickest of the pursuing throng. Now the struggling mob moved this way, now that, then came a check, in which dozens fell scrambling over each other in hustling piles; the shrill squealings of the unhappy porker rang louder than all the voices. Jack had caught an ear. Tom had him by another. Bill embraced his unctuous sides. But Small —Small only had the downright honesty to grasp ever at his tail. "Go it long un! Bravo chimbley sweep! Stick to un parson Small!" were the cries that rent the air to cheer him on to victory. Still, however, as they approached what Allan called the "Grand Stand," that is, the place where Meriel sat surrounded by the principal lookers on, none had secured the flying pig, till by an uncommon

effort, the grease being by this time pretty well wiped off, Small seized the slippery appendage with both hands at once, and, falling flat upon his belly, was dragged by in triumphant fastness, till the animal stood stock-still and screamed an obstinate submission to its conqueror. Great was the applause that issued from both actors and spectators. All rejoiced at the curate's success, for, in spite of Small's eccentricities, there was not a better hearted nor more innocent creature breathing; and, poor as he was, he was ever as ready to give his last shilling to a needy parishioner as he was now pleased to order his pig to be divided amongst those who most rarely tasted of such dainty flesh.

A brief half hour, granted for the recovery of breath, having elapsed, arrangements followed for the race. It was found that, taking into consideration the limited breadth of the course, the members who were to contend had to be divided into two heats. It also was settled that the respective winners should run subsequently in a course by themselves. In this division, Allan and Lord Granstein were allotted to one party, Fabian to another. Sir

Foy himself conducted the starting, about which you may be sure he was as pompous as ever, pronouncing so many of the starts to be false ones that Allan, who was in the first lot, threatened to retire unless this absurd nicety on his father's part were given over. The result of the first race proclaimed the village tailor first, Granstein second, and Allan Derisley third. Allan declared this to have been the only really false start that was made, and that but for the remonstrance he was, at the moment the signal was given, making with his father, his place in the race would have been a better one; however that might be, Meriel, who had attentively listened to his statement, delivered her judgment in this wise:—"If," said she, "you, Mr. Derisley, be a swifter runner than the others, it were certainly unjust you should miss the prize by the accident of a false start; therefore you are permitted to run with the winners of the next course in the final heat, for if you still come behind this will "prove no one's misfortune but your own." As the moment for the second race drew nigh, any one might have observed (Raven was the only one who did observe it) how Meriel's

color fled from her cheeks, how her bosom heaved with the beating of her heart, and how her eyes were keenly straining to take in the whole circumstances of the start. Fabian was well known throughout the district to be an excellent runner, indeed, to excel in all manly exercises, but in the lot against which he now stood was a second tailor of much wider renown than the other man of stitches, for this last was a pedestrian who had run in several great matches, and went by the name throughout the country of "Antelope Bill." So much had this hero's fame formed the subject of conversation around the "grand stand," that Meriel could not help knowing exactly what the posture of affairs was. Several bets were offered and accepted while preliminaries were being settled at the further end of the course. Allan was very anxious to back Mr. Antelope Bill against Fabian, and pressed Meriel hard to wager half a dozen pair of gloves with him. If anything could have increased her aversion for the young man, this ill-timed show of his jealousy would have done it. Just otherwise Lord Granstein, whose admiration of her fully equalled that of any other of her lovers,

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raised himself in her esteem by heartily accepting Allan's offer. Presently a cry announced they were off. Not the great stakes depending on the result of the "Derby" could create intenser interest in the minds of the greatest gamblers than did this trial of human speed affect some of those who witnessed it. Trifling as the occasion was, the fiercest passions of the heart were burning to anticipate its issue. Pride, vanity, jealousy, and love. For let it not be forgotten that beside the high-born actors in the scene, hundreds of simple folk stood with hearts as true to nature as were theirs. Other pairs of lovers were on the course, and at the winning-post, each paying their tribute to inexorable humanity. So is it in all this world's matters; for at a game of chuck-farthing a boy's brains may be knocked out, and as pretty a business may hang thereby as to the rupture of any of the ten commandments.

Well! the excitement lasted but a short time, Fabian and the tailor came in neck and neck, the others, to a man, were distanced. Again a short space intervened to receive the encouragement of their friends, to take in another hole of the belt, and for the last time

the champions are arrayed in order. Both sides of the course are densely crowded, only five have to run; the performance of each is open to the criticism of hundreds; all are winners, but out of them only one can win. Now, Antelope Bill, your professional reputation is at stake. To be beaten by a chance striver at a village race would be disgrace to all thy friendly backers, would be subject of scorn and ridicule to thy foes. Allan, beware you redeem the opportunity which indulgence has permitted, or by the bunch of them you will assuredly be set down as a braggart. Good Stitcher, speed thee now, for the honor of thy native village trembles at the goal. Granstein, my noble youth, titled name avails naught here; limb against limb, the best man shall win, and courtesy is as little the game to-day as thou thyself would'st have it. Fabian, beware of the pedestrian tailor. He alone shares thy thoughts with her who shall award the victory. They start—they fly. Good bye Allan; farewell Granstein; village tailor thou art done for. Now race ye my merry victors. Strain your nervous limbs. Give space to your panting lungs. Nimbler of the two is

the trained Antelope. But Fabian's stride is like the red deer's bound. Yet fifty yards—five and twenty, still shoulder to shoulder. Shall neither of them win? The tailor's hair is bound off his brow with a fillet, his thin pale face shows signs of dire distress, his nostrils yawn to the utmost limit of their muscles. Fabian's flaxen locks stream behind him to the wind; his eye flashes with the mettle that is now heated to glowing within him; his teeth are set, though widely parted are his lips; his usually placid and good-humoured face is lighted up with a wild air of frantic determination. Till within ten yards of the goal any one might have fancied the contest drawn; but not so Fabian himself. Like as the high-bred steed, who has all but burst his heart with surpassing efforts to keep his place to just the last, springs with one indignant bound at the first touch of the reserved spur, so sprang Fabian at some spurring thought. And so passed he, and so he won upon, his rival.

Poor Meriel, what became of the fine resolutions she had made two days ago? They might be still in her mind, but so bewildered was she with other thoughts, these resolutions

all broke loose, and, like cattle in a flower-garden, trampled down the beautifully arranged borders of budding duty, and played such havoc that I ween it will be a rare task for her, poor child, to put all straight again. Fabian was surprised, nay, hurt, at her conduct here. She gave the purse and garland to the tailor. Whether in the last five seconds of the race her senses had failed her, — whether her father's presence, or doubt of her self-command, or any other cause frightened or made her nervous, I know not. She thus bestowed the prize, and saying the umpire's decision was without appeal, left her lover to make what he could of this strange capricious treatment.

CHAPTER IV.

Leaving the whole party still on the ground, where we propose to rejoin them for a short time at the close of the festival, we must beg the attention of our reader to a scene of very different character which transpired in the same village, though about a mile from the arena whence we remove him. The place we allude to was a narrow lane outside the village, in which two or three miserable cottages were huddled together in a manner that might lead the beholder to fancy if one of them should have had a blow from a sledge hammer the rest would have fallen with it to the ground. A filthy pool of black water, reeking of pestilential odors stood like a mote along the wall sides. The furthermost of the three cabins could not be entered unless by stepping through this pool; that is to say, by stepping on to some stones which were nearly immersed, but which had been so placed as to raise the stepper out

of the mire. Such a house was it as the poet describes when he talks of—

> A residence for woman, child, and man,
> A dwelling-place, and yet no habitation;
> A house; but under some prodigious ban
> Of excommunication.

Picking his way carelessly over the stones, Raven reached the door, which he first knocked, then opened and went in at. There was not a bit of furniture inside, except the log of a tree, and a low three-legged stool. Upon the first sat Mark Sandford with his back leaning against the wall; on the other sat Molly, smoking her pipe, and nursing a fire with small bits of wet sticks, which filled the whole place with blinding smoke. Mrs. Sandford was seated on a wooden box, giving suck to her infant; and in the corner of the room lay little Tommy, as it might be asleep, but covered quite over with a blanket.

"How's the child now?" whispered Raven, looking towards the blanket. "Does he sleep?"

"To wake no more," was the answer.

"Dead?" said Raven.

"Such innocence was fitter for heaven than

earth, sir. He is happier with the angels than he might have been here. God's love is very great! Come, sir, look upon his sweet face for the last time. Nay, do not hold back on my account. To see the stamp of death upon these little features is to read a pledge of God's mercy that speaks to my heart more convincingly than all the texts of yon sacred volume. Wherefore could such a sweet creation be lent to us but for the making of it into something yet diviner? Look there! The soul, as you knew, that once informed those limbs was beautifully pure; yet, pure as it was, this little frame was not an unworthy tenement. To snap that union, to convert this delicate morsel into corruption, unless to unite that which bears no comparison with this to greater perfection still, were the work of a demon, but never, never Thine, O God! Shall my heart repine, then, with selfish sorrow for such a gain to my best beloved child? or shall I blaspheme heaven by doubting wherefore God tears to shreds the hearts he makes in us; or shall I fear that he will mock, by eternal banishment, those we dote on instinctively? No, sir! If these waxen

cheeks are moistened by my tears, it is the weakness of the flesh, not the misgiving of the spirit that lets them fall."

"Such practical faith," said Raven to himself, "might teach a lesson to truth-seeking sages. The creed that can staunch a present sorrow, and promise at the same hour a joy to come, attains the only end—HAPPINESS—for which man searches after wisdom. Poor fettered Reason galls herself by eternally futile struggles with her chains. But Love, illimited, unbound, penetrates to the arcana of the most High!"

"He smote also the first-born in the land," croaked a voice from the chimney-side; "and their enemies also oppressed them,"—mumble, mumble. "But he that dwelleth in the secret place shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

"I'm afeard, sir," said Mrs. Sandford, wofully, "we're quite in a sad mess to see a gentleman; but what with the children (the habit of making this excuse was still strong upon her) and being turned out of the lodge so unexpectedly like, we havn't had time to make things comfortable yet."

"You must want the means, I fear," said Raven, slipping his purse with much gentleness into Mark's hand.

"No, sir, no! Though God bless you for your kindness; we want not for money; an angel has visited us even in this sorry place. Miss Sigismond's generosity has amply provided against the want which, but that God had chosen such a messenger, we might have suffered from. This it is," said Mark, pointing to the blankets, "that has unfitted me for other considerations; but by heaven's mercy I have yet left to me those who claim my energies, and so soon as the last ceremony has been performed (Mr. Pilgrim should be here by now) I shall set about getting some furniture into the house for my wife and the old mother."

"Ay, ay! I go mourning all the day. But the fire consumed their young men, and their maidens shall not be given in marriage. Ha! ha! ha!"

In a short time the door-way was darkened, a man dressed as a clergyman entered the cabin. His features wore a look of gloomy melancholy. His voice was attuned per-

fectly to his appearance. He exchanged a very formal bow with Raven, and then addressed himself to Sandford.

"You have sent for me, Mark Sandford. What is it that you require of me?"

"The child, sir, is dead, and I hoped it might be convenient for you to bury it this afternoon."

"I heard," replied Mr. Pilgrim, "that the hand of the Lord had been laid heavily upon you; may this visitation, through His infinite mercy, warn you to flee from the wrath to come. Hear how the Scripture speaketh to the foolish man. I would not willingly think that the evil of your ways proceeded from a worse cause than blindness: thus it is said, 'His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them."

"I hope, sir," said Mark, "you will not let your poor opinion of me interfere with the performance of those solemn rites which, as a minister of the gospel, you are the properest person to execute."

"I am but a wicked servant of the Lord's," said Mr. Pilgrim; "nevertheless I strive to

walk according to His commandments. You, Mark Sandford, are a dissenter, and God spared none who were not of the house of Israel. Hear, too, what St. Paul says again to apostates. 'Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. For it is impossible for those who, having once tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again, unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.' Mark Sandford, you, I say, are crucifying Christ again. Oh! may you be spared from the torments of hell's eternal flames. As to your child, the gates of heaven are closed upon it by your own hands; and since you have kept it from the flock of Christ, I, as His shepherd, cannot fold it with His sheep."

With these words, he left the poor people to get their little son buried how they could.

"Ah!" said Mark, when he was gone, "such mistaken zeal only widens the breach between

the Church of England and those who, were she sometimes but a little more indulgent, would gladly call her mother: many a conscientious but misjudging clergyman thinks to discourage dissent in his parish by shutting his school to dissenter's children; by withholding relief from the dissenting poor; by refusing to baptise; nay, sometimes, as now, to bury their children. But all these practices, Mr. Raven, only make bad blood, and those who had but a little difference of opinion between them upon some perhaps trifling matter once, come at last to hate each other with the full rancour of religious bigotry. Mr. Pilgrim is a good man, sir, as need be; but I cannot think he fully entertains the Catholic spirit which seems, in my poor judgment, to pervade the whole of Christ's teaching."

Scarcely had Mark concluded this just and sensible observation when another dark figure crossed the threshold; this was no other than Mr. Small.

"Dear, dear," he stammered, shaking Sandford nervously by the hand, "only just heard, sad indeed, very much shocked; but anything I can do—" poor fellow! his eyes were half-

filled with tears the whole time he was speaking. When he was a little composed Raven led him on one side, and told him it would be a great comfort to the family if he would undertake to bury the child. This he instantly promised to do, though Raven thought it proper to inform him how his vicar had declined to give burial to a dissenter's child. To this Small replied, if he should lose his curacy he certainly would perform the Church Service over it; and would instantly go and order the clerk to dig a grave in the churchyard, that, if possible, the funeral might take place that very evening. The assurance of this, which the honest fellow confirmed by his hasty departure, running, as they could see, with all the speed his long legs could carry him, gave heartfelt pleasure to poor Mark and his wife.

And now, Raven finding Sandford more cheerful than when he first came, left with a promise to obtain for him some employment, this being, as he saw by the other's manner, the thing of all others he most desired. As Raven walked back to the village green, his scheme for procuring Mark a place being already formed, many thoughts passed

through his mind suggested by the behaviour of that simple, noble creature. He could not help reflecting how, in the midst of such overwhelming misfortune, (for death, ruin, and disgrace were staring him in the face at once), Mark was supported above them all by faith, hope, and charity; in a word, by the three great principles of the Christian religion: a thought full of encouragement, inasmuch as here was the best possible proof of what many heighten their pain by doubting, that God not only can, but actually does comfort those who put their whole trust in Him in the hour of bitterest distress. These and many other similar reflections were engaging Raven's mind as he returned to the green. But ere he had walked above half way back he was met by one, who, though not yet old, was apparently bent double with grief, and who put the whole of his meditations to the rout. As he came up with this man, Raven fully anticipated he would beg some pecuniary relief of him, for his clothes were in such a state, any one would naturally have supposed it was for want of means that he suffered. Not a word nor a look, however, did the other

exchange with him, but simply made as though he would pass him on the road without the smallest notice. Had the man begged alms there is no occasion to doubt Raven would have relieved him with money, and have hastened on his way; but now that he solicited not so much as his attention, curiosity did what charity, in this instance, would not have done.

"My good man," said Raven, "what is it that so distresses you? Can I be of any assistance?"

At this the man raised his streaming eyes, but instantly turned them again upon a bible which he held in his hand, and pondered intently upon that all the more earnestly, so it seemed, for the interruption caused by the question.

Again Raven interrogated him, more curious now than ever to know the cause of this violent sorrow. "Are you in want?" said he. "Has any one maltreated you? Have you sustained some dreadful loss? Forgive me if I intrude upon your grief; but my only desire is to alleviate it if, that is, you will tell me how I may do so."

"Sir," said the man, "you little guess to whom you offer this consolation; and I think if you knew how precious my time was you would not trouble me with your importunity." With this he set himself again to read with all his might at his bible, following the lines with the point of his finger, with the purpose of keeping his mind intent upon the passage.

"I am heartily sorry," said Raven, "if you are offended, but—"

"No offence, sir, no offence! For mercy's sake! do not lay this one more sin upon my broken back. I am already the most miserable sinner that ever walked the earth; and having but a few hours left to repent of my sins, how can I waste these by idle conversation?"

Raven now began to suspect the poor creature must be slightly beside himself, so he resolved to comfort him if he could. "A few hours!" he exclaimed. "What may this mean? I never saw a man more likely to live a score of years in my life; what could have possessed you with such an absurd notion?"

"Is it possible," said the other, "you do

not see the word DEATH written upon my brow? Look there!" and he pointed to the place; "there is the same mark which was stamped upon Cain, and for the like crime I bear the like curse."

"I do not pretend," returned Raven, evincing no surprise at this awful confession, "I do not pretend to read the closed pages of your past life; but I do plainly perceive, by the most unmistakable evidence, (and of this, having great experience in these matters, I am a most excellent judge), I clearly perceive, I say, that you have yet many years to live."

"Do you think so?" said the other, in a pitifully dubious accent. "A few months at most, or but two or three weeks; perhaps but a day or two—nay, a few hours—or, who knows, I may die this very night." Here he set about reading afresh with more desperation than ever, and so intent did he now become that Raven would shortly have desisted from further attempt to distract him, had not the poor fellow, of his own accord, suddenly turned round, and thus recommenced talking. "You have heard of me and my dreadful crime of course?"

"I may have done so, but really I forget the particulars," said Raven; "indeed, I rather suspect the current version of your story must be incorrect."

"Then hearken," said he, "to the truth from my lips, and when I am dead, (it is impossible I can be spared another twenty-four hours) let this—the true version—be published to the world: and when I am in everlasting torment, which must inevitably be my lot, the thought that the world knows the extenuating circumstances of my crime may perchance be sometimes like a drop of water to my parched tongue."

He then withdrew from the road, and motioning Raven to follow, sought a grassy seat beneath the hedge. The man seemed fastidious in his choice of spots.

"We shall not," said Raven, "find a softer turf than this."

"I do believe," said the other, "none but the dainty feet of jackasses have crushed these tender sods before us." So saying, he sat down, and having marked the place in his bible, closed the book, and went on.

"I was born in the county of ——shire,

my parents were respectable tradesfolk, and both, I may say, came of a long-lived stock, though my mother did not live quite to the same old age as my father; still, longevity, I have understood, is as frequently inherited from the male as from the female line; not that I lay any stress upon this now, for alas! my hours are numbered. Where was I? Ah! well. I was of a disposition little suited to my station in life, though of one exactly adapted to that which it was the ambition of my parents, especially of my mother, to see me attain to. The fact of my being an only child enabled them both the better to indulge the hope of some day seeing their son in the position of a gentleman. I must not omit to mention that though my father might have left his wishes on this head to rust with inaction, my mother, who was the illegitimate offspring of an Irish peer, by his lady's maid, was so filled with notions of high birth that she never left her husband a moment's peace till he sent me to a private school, where I was the only boy not the son of a lord. Here, contrary to my expectations, my life was an intolerable burden to me, for instead of feeling

myself to be the equal of my companions, I was perpetually reminded of the difference in our fortunes; till, on one occasion, being called 'Figs,' in allusion to my father's trade as a grocer, I fell into such a violent passion that I ran away from school, and from that day conceived a mortal hatred against the aristocracy which I never afterwards could get the better of.

My nature, as I before said, was what is termed romantic, and having, soon after I left school, become devoted to the perusal of novels and poetry, I persuaded my father to send me to Germany. Here the whole sorrow of my existence had its rise. I entered one of the universities as a student, and passing through all phases of religious belief, and religious scepticism, being at one time of my course a bigoted Roman Catholic and not long after this a most complete atheist, I, at last, found refuge in the philosophy of the ancients, and came at length to the conviction that the only true doctrine this world had ever listened to was taught by Pythagoras. This doctrine of the transmigration of souls, although it has been the means of rendering me the

most miserable being that ever trod God's earth since the days of Cain, is, as I can prove to you by a thousand passages in this holy book, the very doctrine which Jesus Christ was afterwards sent into the world to confirm; and I would have you know, as you value your salvation, that every one who does not believe this with all his heart, will most infallibly be condemned to everlasting punishment.

Well! I see you are impatient, therefore I must hasten on to the great crisis of my unhappy career. Suffice it to say, with respect to that portion of my life spent in Germany, I made myself master of their chief accomplishments, amongst which was the singular practice in which no other nation except England can compete with them—I mean the power of drinking beer by quarts, and even by gallons, at a draught. I also became a great adept at duelling with the broad sword, which has enabled me, in the course of my life, to kill three men without any other mischief to myself than the loss of this eye, and of my left ear. In addition to these acquirements I learned to play the flute so skilfully that I came at last to

imitate the notes of birds with such precision, it were impossible to distinguish the instrument from the voice of the songster. Indeed, such address had I got by practice, I could even mimic the chirping of sparrows, and several other sorts of birds, which, having no melody or music whatever in their calls, were extremely difficult to imitate. To accomplish these niceties, however, I spent six years of incessant labour, during the whole of which time the instrument was scarcely ever out of my hands; but the whole of this labour was thrown away; for one day a parrot bit the top of my little finger to the bone—an accident that alas! maimed my execution for life. After a long absence I returned home to find my mother a widow, and myself in possession of about six thousand pounds, and a thriving business in the grocer's trade. But as my heart sickened at the sight of a shop, and my mother was about to be married again to the master of a livery stables, I sold my stock-in-trade, and by the merest accident, for nothing could have been more foreign to my tastes, found my interests suddenly involved in horse-racing. Here I fell in with

one of my old scoolfellows; but very far from treating me with the superciliousness of former days, he became 'hail fellow well met' with me at once. Through him I fell acquainted with several gentlemen of the highest rank; but although these men professed the common law of honour as the rule for their actions in other concerns, they had for their dealings on the turf a peculiar code of their own which, as it was always liable to be changed, and as the observance of it was subject to such an infinity of conditions, varying, so it seemed, to suit either the taste or the necessity of every one, I never, for the life of me, could make out what might or might not be done. I suppose it was to this density on my part that I owed the loss of my whole fortune; for, having acted by the instructions of one nobleman, I did not see how it was to my interest to act precisely contrary by the instructions of another, although each of them assured me, on his honour, that he advised me for my advantage alone. I did, it is true, partly conform to the councils of both; though it could not have been in the way they intended; for, as it happened, I lost one-half of my fortune to one, and

the remainder to the other. My friend, out of compassion, soon afterwards introduced me to a young lady of excessive beauty, who, he told me in confidence, was a great fortune; I was so struck by her first appearance, I could not but express my astonishment that he himself should neglect the chance of forming a union which promised so much happiness. To this he replied, there were two very good reasons for his not doing so. The first was the lowliness of her station as compared with his; and the other was that she had refused him though he had twice proposed, and still continued to treat his addresses with contempt. The truthfulness of this last reason assigned by him was obvious enough, for I observed when he introduced me that she regarded him with signs of the bitterest scorn and indignation. All this behaviour only inflamed my desire to win so proud and disdainful a beauty; there was, however, one serious obstacle in the way; this was the objection of her mother, who was a very vulgar person; by-the-bye, her mother had no pretext for objecting to my birth, since she herself was the daughter of a pettifogging money-changer; nor had she the right I then supposed

she had, to interfere on the score of means; nevertheless, on this ground she took her stand, declaring she would never consent to her daughter's marriage with a pauper, for she had brought her up to expect every luxury, and her marriage with me would subject her, such were her own words, to struggles and privations which her child was yet too young to see the evil consequences of. Resolved not to be baulked by these difficulties, in truth they raised my passion a thousand degrees, I cast about for means to carry off clandestinely the object of my affections. Already she had consented, I must tell you, to become my wife, and manifold were the schemes vainly contrived for an elopement. One of these attempts had like to have cost me my life, for while I was in the act of serenading my love, that is, while I was warning her of my presence by imitating the screech of the owl upon my flute, and was gazing intently on her window, my feet misguided me in the dark, and I was precipitated headlong into a tank kept filled with liquid manure; undismayed, however, by many similar accidents, I at length found means to achieve my purpose, though

with what success you shall presently hear. I had constructed a ladder of rope which my love had drawn up to her window by a piece of string: the upper end of this she fastened to the sill. Already was she half-way to the ground, my arms were open to receive her. Sir," said the narrator, suddenly checking himself, "if you look at your watch at the very moment when I reach one of the most intensely exciting passages in my life, it becomes evident to me that my narration has grown tedious to you; I will therefore spare you the trouble of—"

"My dear friend," rejoined Raven, hastily, "it is impossible for you to conceive how deeply interested I am in your story. But," said he, still looking at his watch, "as I cannot see where the interest of it is to end, I dare not suffer myself to listen another minute. When I fell in with you I was hastening to fulfil an office of charity, which I fear I may have already lost the opportunity of effecting. Pardon me, therefore, if I tear myself away; yet let me intreat you to give me your address, that I may return and hear the conclusion of your history to-morrow."

"To-morrow," echoed the other; "to-morrow I shall be numbered with the dead; and that point of my tale, which alone concerns me to tell the truth of, remains still the burden on my soul and conscience. Alas! I had hoped I might have laid it down before I died." Here the man began to sob anew; but after a little coaxing Raven learnt from him that he intended to stay that night and the following day at the "Mitre," where, despite the other's conviction that he should not be found alive, Raven promised to visit him in the morning.

It was altogether about two hours after leaving them when Raven rejoined his friends at Nordefall. During his absence, matters had not sped with Master Fabian better than in the forenoon. Meriel clung to the side of Mr. Sigismond when her lover drew nigh, as though she were frightened to death at his approach. She courted, too, the society and attentions of Lord Granstein, whose gallantry kept pace with the encouragement it received. And thus Meriel endeavoured in order to satisfy her duty, to force Fabian out of her own mind; and, above all, thus thought to crush the love

which she knew inflamed his breast. This last object to her kind heart was in reality the first in importance; but she forgot that had Fabian been as cold as he was now impetuous, this behaviour was exactly what she would have adopted to reincense him; so consistent are the actions of these dear creatures with the dictates of reason, whose seat, not as is the case with the other half of creation, is supposed by some to lie in the heart, instead of in the head. Directly Meriel set eyes upon Raven she inquired of him whither he had been. Without more ado he related to her the circumstance of the child's death, and begged her to exert herself to obtain for Mark Sandford some post suitable to his exigencies. She wanted no persuasion to do a kind act at any time; now, especially, did she desire to meet Raven's suggestions.

"But how in the world," said she, "can I get him a place? My father will never employ him again; for when he has made up his mind, or said he will do a thing, he never relents till his resolution is forgotten."

"Well!" said Raven, "I will show you how you may serve those poor people; and

that without delay. Tell Lord Granstein the story, and request him to find Mark employment." At this proposition Meriel looked exceeding grave; on what account my gentle readers will have no difficulty in guessing; nor, indeed, had Raven, for he was pretty familiar with the subtlest motions of the mind, and he had a very intimate knowledge of our young lady's character to boot. "Meriel," said he, "for once your sense of delicacy must yield to a still higher consideration; you must forget yourself for the sake of others."

"My dear friend," she replied, "you read my thoughts, but not yet clearly. Is it not for the sake of another that just now—to-day—(she hesitated)—I should be careful of conveying a wrong—I hardly know what I am saying, Raven, the excitement of the games the whole day has been too much for me, though you—" Raven made no answer; he looked, letting her see that he looked, towards Fabian; Meriel blushed deeply at Raven's mistake, (this time it was the young viscount, not Fabian, to whom she referred), but seemed to recover herself instantly. "I can depend on Lord Gran-

stein's generosity," she said, and walked straight up to where he stood.

A few minutes sufficed to put his lordship in possession of the leading facts; and without the least hesitation he replied. It so chanced that one of his gamekeepers had just left him. The place, perhaps, might not be the best suited to one of Sandford's disposition, or to his training, but it was worth fifty pounds a-year, which a labouring man could scarcely hope to earn in any other way; and this he could hold till something better could be found for him. Fabian kept aloof while this little matter was being settled, though, to be sure, he could not keep his eyes from the object of his provoked affections. When the affair was concluded, and Meriel had received the promise for her friend, her countenance lighted up with such a sweet expression of gratitude and pleasure, and so cordially did she express her thanks to Lord Granstein by shaking his hand, that Fabian actually believed, (although love alone could have made him fancy the thing would have been done after this fashion,) that Meriel had accepted the young Viscount's offer of marriage, and both were giving vent

to their happiness without even a pretence to modest restraint. Raven perceived the plight his friend was in, so by way of compassionating him, asked him how he had prospered.

"Prospered," cried the other, "my greatest enemy could not wish me worse success. Upon my word I think Meriel must have turned flirt or jilt, for though, as you know, I am not easily disconcerted, her conduct to-day has fairly knocked me off my legs; and may I never see her pretty face again if it was'nt as black as thunder the live-long day. But tar and feather me if they aint all the same. Like mice in a parlor, they'll nibble and play all round you while you're quiet; take the least notice of them, they're into their holes before you can say Kamschatka. '*N'aimer guerre en amour est un moyen assuré pour être aimé,*' says La Rochefoucauld; and if I don't stick to that maxim for the future, I'll have to know a reason for it."

"'A woman's fitness comes by fits,'" quoted Raven, "but when a man turns woman you can't marry two of a sex."

"I give it up," said Fabian.

"Tush!" said the other, "if you turn

skittish, too, the riddle will solve itself." Fabian accepted the encouragement with a smile, though a sigh followed it, as, while he rode away, he cast a parting glance in the direction of his mistress.

CHAPTER V.

And now, dear reader, here follows for thy perusal the sequel of the story broken off in the last chapter. True! inclination might prompt us to pursue the fate of those in whom we feel a greater interest. But we are arrested from the thought of baulking this curiosity, by the recollection of what happened to a story-teller of old who chanced to underrate the inconvenience which suspense might occasion in the mind of a king. As this little tale is one of no particular interest, it is more than probable that it has long since slipped out of your memory; but this latter reason will justify me, as it justifies most authors (in their own eyes) for repeating what is no less ancient than the time of the renowned Demetrius. "When," so the story runs, "When Demetrius had conquered Ptolemy in a great naval engagement off Salamis, he sent immediately to his father,

king Antigonus, to acquaint him with his success, that that monarch, whose aged breast burned with impatience to learn the double fate, of his only son and of his kingdom, might not be kept a moment longer than need was, in suspense. For his messenger, Demetrius chose one Aristodemus, a Milesian, because, says the historian, this man was not only active and expeditious, but because for his imagination in narrating an account, that is, as a most prodigious liar, he had not his equal in all Greece. Now it came to pass when this Aristodemus, who possessed to perfection that art, which all men, unless Solomon in this particular instance proved the truth of his own adage, cultivate, though with different success, viz., that of improving truth by decorating it according to the taste and fancy of the moment, when, I say, this illustrious liar drew nigh unto the coast of Syria, he would not suffer the ship to make land; but ordering it to anchor at a distance, and all the company to remain in it, took boat and went on shore alone. Thence he slowly proceeded towards the palace of the king; who sat the while with his perspective to his eye, biting

his nails to the quick to gather the first intimation of the herald's news; one after another of the king's officers were sent to demand what intelligence he brought, but instead of giving them any answer, he walked on in silence and solemnity. The monarch at last, unable to wait any longer, ran out to meet him; crowds also gathered round to learn the tidings. Then, in fine, Aristodemus hailed king Antigonus as father of a conqueror; and would have gone on to give the most brilliant description of a fight ever told, when Antigonus cut him short, and with some pretty compliment to him as bearer of such welcome intelligence, ordered the poor knave to be soundly whipped round the town for thus seasoning the king's pleasure with an ill-measured quantity of provocation and pain.

Warned by this hero's reward, we press on to conclude our own interrupted episode. "She was half-way to the ground." The reader's imagination must suppose a night to have passed, and Raven to be with the mendicant at the "Mitre." The same scene as at first took place. The same piteous exhibition of terror at death. The same coaxing on one

side, reluctance on the other, humouring here, yielding there, all to have been re-enacted; and thus the dialogue went on.

"She was half-way to the ground; my arms were ready to receive her, when, being nearly twice my size and weight, the ladder gave way, and in her fall she knocked me stunned to the ground. The accident produced no ill effects. We were married in due course. But how great was my surprise when I found that my wife had not now, nor indeed had ever had, the remotest prospect of possessing a fraction. In addition to this misfortune, every day of our being together she grew more and more unhappy; and instead of the bliss I had always promised myself from the marriage state, the vulgar incidents of connubial life which my wildest fancy could no longer invest with a particle of romance, combined with the worst conditions of poverty, harrassed me till I lived in constant debate as to the least painful method of committing suicide. But an evil would have been a mere fleabite compared with what I have now to record. Oh! that I had, ere then, passed the sharp edge of my razor, instead of the blunt one (as I

many times did) across my throat. Oh! that I had perished at the instant of learning my disgrace—my disgrace do I call it? The villany I should have said,—the incredible, the monstrous villany of others. Four months, scarcely four months, had elapsed from the date of my marriage, when my wife gave birth to a full-grown child. Then I understood the motives of my noble acquaintance in bringing about my marriage. Then I remembered, then I learnt to interpret the bitter, disdainful looks with which she submitted to the scheme he had contrived to save her honour by.—I cannot, however, at this distant date, bear to dwell on an event which I sometimes suspect has seriously affected my mind. I can only tell you that it is that child's life for which I have to answer, and for the taking which I am doomed to eternal remorse."

What the unfortunate man said concerning the effect his grief had had upon his mind was shockingly verified by the conclusion of his story, which he delivered as follows:

"I know not what became of my wife; I never saw her again; the child died, so

by accident I afterwards discovered. It was just twenty years to a day from that of my forsaking them that I became avenged of my dishonour, though, woe is me! by the foulest and most cruel murder. It boots not to enter into the details of a wretched life. I sunk lower and lower in the scale of society; sometimes I was a beggar, sometimes a labouring man, a mechanic once, and once a soldier. Through all these vicissitudes my mind pondered secretly, though incessantly, on the great mysteries of religion. Every day new revelations were vouchsafed to me, attesting by incontrovertible evidence the miserable blindness and sinful perverseness of the whole race of man; at the same time that it revealed to me the glorious truths of metempsychosis, which, but for the teaching of Pythagoras, I should never have been able to discover in this sacred volume (the Bible). To cut short a long tale, I by-and-bye fell into the service of a Doctor of Divinity, whom I remained with till the committing of my crime. This clergyman was one of those happy-dispositioned persons upon whose constitutions the cares of the world fall like

mere snow-flakes; nor did anything ever the least trouble him but an occasional fit of gout which, I must confess, he sometimes suffered very acutely from. But whether this complaint arose from his sedentary habits, (for though his living was one of the largest in England, he kept a curate and a lay-rector to do all the duties of it,) or whether it might be caused by the nature of his diet, which consisted of beef, pheasants, wild-fowl, venison, plum puddings, custards, and a bottle of port wine regularly every day, is more than my limited knowledge of physic permits me to affirm. In point of fact he was so corpulent that he could not take exercise, except—this I can hardly mention without a thill of horror freezing the very marrow in my bones—except upon a horse called Proxy. Oh! Proxy! hadst thou not suffered enough for crimes of which thou wert as innocent as myself, or wert thou not the innocent cause of sufficient sorrow to me by thy birth, without adding to my misery by thy death? Yet, what avails it to murmur against fate? Confession is the only balm that may perchance salve my tortured conscience. Well, sir, the care of Proxy

was allotted to my charge. For a horse he was old. When I became his keeper he was past eighteen years of age. But notwithstanding his age he had a sprightly spirit; and several times he had all but made an end of his master. Whenever this happened, that is, whenever the smallest irregularity in his pace shook the doctor's stomach, the word was, 'No corn, not a grain of corn, nay, not a mouthful of hay, for Proxy; keep Proxy to the chopped straw. He'll be the death of me yet, if we can't cure him of his pranks.' So Proxy was reduced to his chopped straw, till, poor beast, he had no more sprightliness in him. It made me groan as much as it did him almost, when I beheld the dumb thing staggering under that obese clergyman's weight. One day, however, Proxy stumbled, and this gave such a shock to his master, whose belly always rested on the pummel of the saddle, that the doctor threatened to turn me off if I did not get the restiveness, so he still called it, out of the beast. 'Restiveness! bless your reverence's heart!' said I, 'he paces now as if he was walking to his own funeral;' and so, sir, he did,

for he went, as I might say, one step to-day, and another to-morrow. But you are laughing at me; I shall, therefore, not say another word about it."

"No!" said Raven. "go on I intreat; I was but smiling at your manner of expressing his slowness, which I think is the best idea I ever heard in my life. Pray continue."

"What I tell you, sir, is as true as gospel," pursued the other. "Proxy was worn away to a skeleton, when, by some fatal accident (I had been deeply occupied all the morning with my Pythagoras) I forgot to take him his one feed. Returning to the stable, poor Proxy was no more." Here the narrator appeared to suffer from some great mental pang. Recovering himself, with an effort he continued; "Thus was I that child's murderer; and now, sir, you know my terrible fate, and its history."

"That child!" exclaimed Raven. "What child?"

"My wife's child to be sure," cried he. "For I found, by subsequent calculations, which cost me an infinity of pains, that that horse was foaled on the very day the child

had died, and thus I discovered that the poor child's soul passed into the body of that cruelly-murdered animal."

Raven endeavoured to persuade him that he might possibly be mistaken in his calculations. But so firm a hold had his opinions taken of his mind, that the views submitted to him by Raven, as the most rational he could think of, had no other effect than to cause the other to maintain his notions with ten times more vehemence than ever.

"Granting then," said Raven, wishing to shake him in other ways, "your doctrine—"

"Not mine," ejaculated the other, "not my doctrine, the doctrine contained in the bible, and taught first by Pythagoras, afterwards in the New Testament."

"Well! granting the doctrine of Pythagoras to be the true one, I was ever under an impression that this great philosopher had preached against the fear of death."

"You are right," returned the other, laying his forefinger on the sleeve of Raven's coat, "you are perfectly right. But observe, convinced though I have long been, of the truth of his doctrine, I neglected, in many

things to train myself to a rigid observance of its precepts; one of his great maxims was, that love should be a pursuit of after-life; but, like a fool, I followed the dictates of nature instead of listening to the divine inspirations of the prophet. So, as in many other ways, I was but half a disciple; and albeit I am well persuaded that had I acted and thought differently than I have done I should now be a different man, yet, so great have been one or two of my offences that it was impossible I should escape punishment."

"Pray," said Raven, "can you tell me what these sins were?"

"Yes!" said the other, "I can tell you one to which I attribute a great share of that vengeance which heaven has showered upon my head. Perhaps you, sir, may not be subject to the same temptation; but it has ever been my misfortune to have a native partiality for *beans*; it has been my curse that I have not always abstained from eating them."

"Can so innocent a vegetable have rendered you so uncomfortable?" inquired Raven, in surprise.

"Innocent! vegetable!" reiterated the other.

"Do you know that beans are produced from the same putrefied matter of which at the creation of the world man was formed? Oh! how thankful I ought to be for the privilege granted to an unworthy wretch like myself, of disseminating such solemn and important truths as these?"

A good deal more nonsense of this kind was talked by this afflicted being; and but that wisdom may be hidden and often revealed even in the ravings of madness—such at all events is the opinion of some—much of this conversation might have been better omitted.

On the same day on which Raven held the above meeting with the lunatic, viz. on the first after the village festival, a very interesting interview took place at Carrol between Belinda and her brother Allan. The ground of it was the occurrences of the preceding day; after breakfast, Miss Derisley feeling much want of sympathy, ventured upon the very remarkable liberty of taking her brother's arm as he strolled about the stable-yard smoking his dirty clay pipe. This liberty she never would have taken had she not flattered

herself that by skilful management, and by a judicious exercise of tact, which, in vulgar parlance, signifies neither more nor less than cunning and deceit, her brother might be led to fancy that her concern was all on his account, and not on her own. He on the other hand would never have submitted to be plagued by such a bore as he regarded his sister to be, unless he had promised himself certain consolation for his uneasiness by putting her to some use, or by gleaning from her observance the encouragement his own declined to yield him. With these aims in view, which, however similar in themselves, had strikingly little reciprocity in them, the brother and sister, in the most affectionate manner conceivable, began to talk of each other's affairs.

"Why, I am sure Allan, dear," quoth Miss Belinda, "you would have won that first race if papa had not bothered you so at starting. For my part I think the decisions were as often wrong as right throughout the whole *fête*. But in that particular case I must say I do think, that is, I am quite positive, nothing could have been so unfair; for the

race was entirely between you and Lord Granstein; and the idea of putting that wretched thing of a tailor first, was, to say the least of it, that is, in my opinion, very bad taste."

"For the matter of the race," replied her brother, "as long as I did not win the last heat it did not make much odds about the first. But I perfectly agree with you my dear Bel. in thinking some of the verdicts rather partial, and I confess such would never have been the case had you been umpire. I certainly would have liked to have cut that long-legged dog Harrod out. I never saw such a conceited puppy in my life; though to be sure he got a pretty good snubbing yesterday. Did you see how Meriel Sigismond choked him off?"

"Yes, dear! and I saw her constantly looking at you. But in what a shameful way Lord Granstein flirted with her all the while."

"Flirting do you call it? I call it being deuced spoony. But I should think she never would marry such a fop as he. Do you think she would Bel.?"

"Really I can't see why Meriel Sigismond should not wish to marry Lord Granstein, unless it be that he is much too good a match for her. I will answer for it she would give her ears to be Lady Granstein to-morrow if she wasn't in love with Mr. Harrod."

"What nonsense you do talk my dear; you get such ridiculous notions into your head, a child has more wit than you."

"Well, Allan, dear, *your* observation cannot be worth very much, for anybody could see with half a glance, whatever Lord Granstein meant, Meriel was only flirting with him to aggravate Fabian, and could you have seen with a woman's eyes, my dear, it would have been quite clear to you that she was thinking of nobody but him from the moment he came on the ground to the moment he left it."

"So *you* think; but then you see, my dear Bel., unfortunately you were quite blinded by jealousy all the time. If you had not been as jealous as old Nick of Meriel—"

"I jealous of that little minx, forsooth. Really Allan I think you are very impertinent;

and if I did not know you were aggravated by disappointment and spite against Fabian Harrod your rudeness would be quite unpardonable."

"Fabian Harrod will have to marry you my dear, of which I sincerely wish him joy; and if he wont have you, which I think is more than probable, his father will not let him marry Meriel, and if I don't marry her, in all likelihood Granstein will, so you see whatever way it happens *you'll* be up a tree."

At the thoughts of this inconvenient position Miss Derisley burst into a flood of tears, and saying, as well as she could for sobbing, that her brother was the most selfish and unkind creature in the world, they parted, without deriving any of the consolation mutually sought from the interview so courted by both. So much has been written and spoken about the poisonous passion whose venom we have just seen working in the veins of a brother and sister, that to trouble the reader with any further remarks about jealousy would, I am persuaded, be offensive. We can only say, when Miss Belinda left Allan to himself, his state of mind grew to be considerably unpleasanter than it was before their meeting.

In other words, the pangs which at certain seasons afflict lions, cocks, turtle-doves, bulls, &c., and which, in their seizures of nobler animals, have induced some to bite off each other's noses, some to starve themselves to death, some to partake immoderately of strong drinks, some to destroy or mutilate the very object of their love, some to grow raving mad, some to become exceeding religious, and in short commit every vagary that the mind can conceive, these pangs of jealousy, I say, took a desperate hold of Mr. Derisley, and worked upon him to that degree, he was ready to vent his spleen on the very first opportunity which might offer. Now, it is well known, for experience teaches it, (there is a proverb in some language exactly to the purpose, which I at the moment forget), that whenever we invite the devil he never put us off with an excuse, but most politely comes to our elbow at any hour, or in any place; ay, should it be in church itself, though holy water is said to make him sneeze; and so handily assists us to do his work, that the doing of it, far from being irksome, is amongst the sweetest pleasures we enjoy. Allan Derisley had scarcely invoked

the powers of darkness to aid his revenge; but true as Mephistopheles to Dr. Faust, Mr. Harrod, senior, waited to do his bidding.

"Ah!" said this gentleman, "Allan, my boy, how are you? Have you seen Fabian this morning? I want to find him, and don't know where he's got to."

"Nordefall Priory, most likely," returned the other, in a tone whose meaning did not escape the practised ears of Mr. Harrod."

"That can't be," replied he, "he knows I do not approve his going there so often; moreover I think Sigismond has a notion Fabian flirts with his daughter."

"He need be precious wall-eyed if he can't see that," said the other, chuckling.

"Indeed, Allan! what do you mean?"

"Mean? why, a bat might see through that millstone."

"You surely do not imply that Fabian goes there for any other than friendly visits?"

Allan nodded significantly.

"Goodness! you astonish me!" exclaimed Mr. Harrod. "This is too bad. Why, I thought Meriel was your *fiancèe*, or, at all events, to be so."

"Mine, no! she's up to the girths in love with Fabian."

"This cannot be; you are surely mistaken; Fabian knows I would disinherit him if he behaved so shamefully to Belinda as this."

"Have you talked to him about Meriel then?"

"Not a syllable, on my honour; still, if what you tell me be true, I must take instant measures to stop it; and rather than my son should behave so scandalously I would—yes—I would even practise some innocent deceit myself to save her, poor child, from dishonour. What is to be done? Surely you Allan would help me for the sake of all parties."

"Say the word, I'm your man."

"Well! I don't know what can be done. The only thing is to put her on her guard. Can't Belinda aid you?"

"That depends on the service."

"If Belinda would lend a hand this is what I should advise—to be sure it is equivalent to telling a white lie—but then to save Meriel, and Fabian, and—"

"Well! out with it."

"'Tis this! let Belinda call on Meriel, and

tell her Fabian has been boasting to you of having won her affections."

"You must put corn in the sieve, or you wont catch that filly. Don't you see she'll twig a game."

"What a diplomatist you would have made. I should never have thought of that. We must contrive something cleverer, I see. Pray summon Belinda to our councils. In these matters I have always found women fullest of ingenuity and resource."

A little explanation soon brought Miss Derisley to a congenial *animus*. Displaying to advantage that versatility in which she was not hehind hand with the rest of her sex, she entered promptly into the proposed design, and in less than five minutes had suggested a vast variety of schemes, which had but one trifling fault, viz., that of being utterly impracticable. Mr. Harrod allowed Allan and his sister to suggest a great many plots before he himself offered any advice. This he did partly because he had long ago, *i. e.* before he came to the house, made up his mind what he intended to do, and partly that he might test the sincerity of the Derisleys'

hatred towards his son and Miss Sigismond. Being perfectly satisfied upon this score, he thus delivered himself.

"If I do not greatly mistake Meriel Sigismond's character, I should say the most remakable feature in it was pride."

"Vanity, Mr. Harrod, vanity," interrupted Miss Derisley."

"Vain she is, of course," pursued the other; but it is her pride I lay most stress on here. For," said he, "*vanity* only craves a perpetual homage for qualities we know we do not possess, while *pride* so puffs us up with ridiculous notions of the little merit we have, that it leads to contemn the praise which in truth we never deserved. Now, were Meriel only vain, the scheme I have to propose would not serve a whit. But being both vain and proud also, this scheme cannot fail. In one of my drawers at home I have a small daguerrotype of my son; this we will send to the young lady, as coming from him."

"Hang it!" cried Mr. Derisley, "that's the very thing to please her. I have heard of miniatures found in wrong hands breaking hearts time out o' mind; but plague me if

ever I heard of a girl's heart being broke because the chap she loved sent her his picture."

"Nevertheless," returned Mr. Harrod, "when I have explained my intention we will see what your sister says to it. Meriel, as I before observed, is very proud, and unless she were betrothed, and had confessed her attachment in return for the declaration of her lover's, the presumption of his taking her acceptance of him for granted, would, under certain circumstances, under circumstances I repeat, operate very powerfully against him."

"If any man had the impertinence to behave so to me," cried Belinda, "I would throw his picture into the fire."

"And be ten times as fond of him five minutes after," interposed the brother.

"For shame Allan," said Mr. Harrod; "but you have not yet heard me out. In addition to the impertinence of sending his portrait, there must be something with it in writing, to show his effrontery the more consummate."

"Wont she smell a rat?" inquired Mr. Derisley.

"Fabian is a very cool hand; she knows this well," replied Mr. Harrod.

"But the hand-writing," suggested Miss Belinda.

"Ah, d—— it! I beg pardon. How about that?" exclaimed the brother.

"The writing must be a thing quite natural, in verse, a single verse if possible; and this, as would be also natural, might be in printed characters upon a small slip of paper, which we will paste upon the back of the miniature. The only difficulty is the verse."

"Oh!" says Miss Belinda, inspired at once with poetic frenzy, "I think we can manage that! Let me see; what is it we want to express?"

"His confidence that she is passionately in love with him. That's all," said Mr. Harrod.

"Ah, I perceive! Well; somebody take a pen, I will dictate. It is rather difficult," confessed Miss Derisley, after a pause.

"It is rather," said Allan.

"Yes, it is very hard," concluded Mr. Harrod.

"Can't you think of some inscription that would do, something of Byron's for instance?" said Miss Derisley. "Ah! stop, I have it," she cried. Write—are you ready with pen and ink?"

"All ready."

"Write then. 'Start not—nor deem my spirit fled.'"

"Why that was written on a skull. That wont do."

"Yet the first line is very suggestive."

"Suggestive be bothered," cried Allan; "you might just as well begin 'Of all the gals in our alley,' which is ten to one more suggestive, for all I can see."

"Something original would be the best," was Mr. Harrod's remark.

"Well!" began Belinda, still undaunted, "suppose you commence thus—

'Keep, oh keep this faithful miniature.'"

"But I say Bel., what rhymes to miniature?" asked Mr. Derisley.

"Now you put me out at once, if you go on so. We must make a start, or we shall never finish."

"That's true," said the brother. "What next?"

"Oh! it is quite impossible to write poetry while you sit grinning there. I shan't try again. If you want verses you may write your own."

"My dear Belinda," remonstrated Mr. Harrod, laying his hand upon her shoulder with that familiarity which he never knew exactly how to express by manner, "stay a minute, we cannot do without you. We must not give in yet. Look here. Do you think this will do? I don't understand rhyming myself; but if you will be so amiable as to mend the lameness of this verse, I think something might be made of it. You can print better than I have done. But I'll read it.

"To prove my trust in your fond heart,
Though fate awhile us sever,
I send you this, my counterpart,
And may you love me ever."

Some objections were made by Miss Derisley, but these were overruled by Allan, so the lines were printed as they stood.

"And now," said Mr. Harrod, "you have a bit of Fabian's hair have you not Belinda?"

"Yes."

"Well! let this be sent with the picture and print in the wrapper. 'To my love, from her's.'"

"Bravo!" ejaculated Mr. Allan, "we'll nobble 'em, I'll wager."

"And," said Miss Belinda, "be sure to send his own servant with the package. For if Meriel suspects anything she will be sure to ask who brought the parcel."

Every precaution being talked over, Mr. Harrod prepared to depart. As he was going out of the room he returned, and closing the door gently behind him, said. "We had better keep our own council about our little plot; because it would spoil the effect if the truth should slip out."

Both promised secrecy.

"And," said he, "I must not leave you without expressing a sincere hope that you will not suffer yourselves to be actuated by any other feeling less innocent than that which has induced you to perform what is really a friendly part towards poor Meriel and Fabian. There is nothing so detestable as plotting when its object is, or when its result may be,

to mar the happiness of another person. In the present case our motives are so purely disinterested, and selfishness enters so little into our designs, that your participation in the matter can never leave me in doubt as to the opinion I should have of you both. And I heartily trust you may meet with the reward you so richly deserve."

Till Mr. Harrod's back was turned this final address met with no response. When he was going out of the room Allan took the opportunity to express his admiration of the speaker by applying his thumb to his nose. Mr. Harrod happening to glance round observed this; but being full of charity and forgiveness he took no notice of it whatever.

CHAPTER VI.

It is remarkable, and worthy to be borne in remembrance by ill-disposed persons, to whom, by the way, this work is no less dedicated than to the good, that a great deal of mischief may be done with a very little trouble. And whereas it costs an infinity of pains (more indeed than many will give themselves) to make a miserable creature happy, there is nothing in the wide world easier than to render a happy being miserable.

Whether it is to be concluded from this that the normal state of man is unhappiness, or that his natural disposition is to do evil, is no doubt a question of vast importance; but it is one that so many philosophers will, we are sure, take upon themselves to solve, without even giving you the trouble to invite them to the labour, that a dissertation on it here would be quite out of place. All that it concerns us to remark upon the subject is this; Mr. Har-

rod's stratagem, simple though it was, gave, in the end, no small degree of annoyance. That such should have been the case seems, I admit, unnatural; but it will no longer appear so if the reader will recollect that poor Meriel was very much in love, a condition which will account for every freak of the imagination, however fantastical it may be.

The first intimation she received of Fabian's dishonesty coming, as it did, from his father through her's, was a blow that severely staggered her good sense. It cost her much ruminating, for nature in these affairs will assert herself; and despite Meriel's duteous resolves, the problem was ever insidiously sneaking back into her fancy how to reconcile an account so substantiated with her preconceived notions of Fabian's sincerity. The only subterfuge by which she escaped this dilemma, was a modest detraction of her own charms. "Why," she aruged, "should he be accused of winning my affections? Did I not yield them up unsolicited by him? Perchance he never intended to ask, never wished, it might be, for more than the first place amongst my friends; and are all who love him to charge him with

trifling with their hearts? No! Their weakness is to blame, not his duplicity. Ah! had I but kept that watch over myself, and laid that restraint upon my thoughts which I never ought to have relaxed, I should not now be so undone. The lesson alas! is a bitter one, but it will serve me for my life. Farewell henceforth to all romance. Welcome now the cheerless realities of a monotonous existence. Mine must be a piteous widowhood! whose remaining days must all be passed in mournful penance for too much happiness, of which I was a witless prodigal. Oh! what a penalty for so blind a fault! For when I loved Fabian with a childish love, I thought of neither faults nor penalties then; not choice nor will was in my love, but so spontaneous, so innocent it was, that t'would have seemed, but for its consequences, to have sprung from heaven. But I now am punished, and he is charged with treachery. Treachery! do they accuse him of treachery to me! to his helpless little playmate! The supposition is too monstrous! Fabian is not a fiend! No, no! I know him better than they all. I know that he is too sincere to

trifle, too generous to betray; and for his boasting, his nature is too noble and too proud to seek its exaltation by the mean devices of a coxcomb. Yes, Fabian! say what they will, I know you love me truly as you ever did!" At this conclusion, which overwhelmed every other thought, poor Meriel burst into a flood of tears; a circumstance which confirms an impression I have often entertained, that in reflecting on our losses we are then most affected when it comes to our remembrance how dear *we* were to those whom we have lost. But so difficult a matter is it to calmly scrutinize our affections at the very moment we are distracted by affliction, that, doubtless ninety-nine out of a hundred will indignantly scoff at this remark, asserting with confidence in reply, that upon *their* lamentations that subtle being Self never yet hath cast the faintest indication of its shadow.

Gradually Meriel sufficiently recovered to contemplate, with more firmness, the painful truth, that her duty to her father, and indeed her own peace of mind, depended entirely on resisting the temptation to dwell upon her disappointment. "To-morrow," she pursued,

for these were all of them the meditations which occupied her throughout the weary night preceding the village festival, "To-morrow we must meet, that is inevitable; and to-morrow I will begin to teach him, poor fellow! by my coldness, that we must in future be on terms of common friendship." The day of the festival came, and passed—as the reader knows how; Meriel's condition, after that day was over, alone remains untold. How did Fabian's conduct affect the decision she had just before come to upon his character? Let us recall what happened. Fabian felt the strongest desire to be at Miss Sigismond's side all day; Miss Sigismond took the greatest care to keep away from him; if, therefore, Fabian had been fifty times more impetuous than he was, the main part of his warmth would have escaped her perception; but Fabian was naturally calm and self-possessed; and, on that particular occasion, as we then stated, he was restrained by tact and delicacy from pressing his suit at an unfavourable moment. So that, upon the whole, especially as he left the ground without even a formal salutation at parting, Meriel considered his

behaviour throughout to be marked, in the first instance, *i. e.* when he rode up to her pony-carriage, by a patronising and provoking assurance, and subsequently by cool and impertinent disrespect.

Meriel Sigismond's spirit was as mettlesome as her heart was warm; to have suffered so much on Mr. Fabian's account, and then to find him quite at his ease under circumstances which lacerated her, argued an insensibility on his part which provoked her to the last degree. And although it would have greatly added to her distress, had her assumed coldness rendered him conspicuously unhappy, it left her excessively indignant to find that apparently he was not much affected by it. "I see," said she, "how blind my infatuation has made me! How preposterously have I deluded myself with the fancies of my own creation? He in love? Oh! he little knows what it is to be the wretched victim of that tyrannous passion. He knows not what it is to spend feverish nights in tormenting doubt; racking the brain with a million thoughts painted in every hue, from most radiant hope to the blackest despair. He never knew what it was to taste, in anticipation,

the heavenly blending of two souls in one, nor the appalling solitariness of unrequited attachment. But is it for one so unworthy that I have undergone all this? Shame upon my weakness! Have I not the courage to undeceive myself, to show him I can be as self-controlled as he is? Yes, forsooth! I may sometimes feel a pang when I reflect how wofully I have been mistaken in his nature. But whatever it cost me, none shall see me suffer."

In this mood was she when the photograph reached her. And notwithstanding the state of virtuous indignation she had worked herself into, the first sight of Fabian's likeness made her tremble from head to foot with emotion, in which anger had no place whatever. A very momentary reflection checked these sensations; and then the audacity of the proceeding so surprised, so startled her, that she was half-minded to cast the whole packet into the fire. The miniature, however, bore such an exact resemblance to the original, and had such a remarkably handsome air about it, that, perhaps, this might have been the means of saving it from immediate destruction. But her

maidenly modesty at length prevailed over every other impulse, and she placed both the hair and portrait under lock and key, firmly resolving not to look at them again, until she should take them out to return them to their proper owner. This she determined to do, either on the following day, or at all events before her departure for Granstein, where it had been arranged she and her parent were shortly to spend a fortnight.

Return we now to the company of her lover. His habitual composure was gradually giving way before the irresistible force of Nature's laws. Obstacles and separations had upon him, though in proportionate measure, the same effect they usually have in like cases. The doubts suggested by Meriel's manner remained to be cleared up. Imagination, of course, only thickened them. Fabian was the last person whom jealousy would seize upon; yet he had a high opinion and a great regard for Lord Granstein, and saw no reason why this young man might not supplant him. It was evident Miss Sigismond and his lordship were on most intimate terms, and as it hath been said, *qui non zelat non amat*, he loves not who is not

jealous, Fabian could not be quite free from disagreeable suspicions. To release himself from these, and to come at the real truth, there was but one path open; this he resolved to take, and determined accordingly to seek an interview and obtain a final explanation, in return for a frank and positive avowal on his own part.

One morning, having thoroughly prepared his mind for that most formidable of events in man's brief career,—the proposition to invest himself and the object of his tenderest affection with the cares of both combined, (which considerate proposal by the way, is admitted to be the greatest compliment a man can offer to a woman, and which also by the way, the latter sometimes appears very ungrateful for), Fabian, with a crowd of ardent professions in his bosom, and a stout oak sapling in his hand, sallied forth to learn his fate. Reader, dear! (I address myself to the gentler sex) before hurrying on to declare what that fate was, I must pause to prepare thy fluttering heart for this important crisis. Need I ask thee to recall those bygone, to anticipate those coming, moments, when the Adonis of thy fancy

did or shall kneel to receive the life-giving "Ye-es," the death-dealing "No!" from lips, the said Adonis would walk from London to Richmond, barefooted—pooh! with tightest boots on, to call his own! Need I entreat thee to inspire thy imagination with the conflicting emotions, the thrilling palpitations, the flesh-creeping fears, that will or did possess thy trembling frame at the thought of the first kiss, that inevitably seals thy timid, but I hope not unwilling assent? No, 'tis needless to harrass thee. For when thou hast finished this chapter, thou wilt perceive there was no occasion for anything of the kind.

Fabian walked briskly till he came within a stone's throw of the Priory; here he paused to listen to the soft sounds of music. He was too far off to catch more than an occasional note. But this note was in the tones of his mistress's sweet voice. He dared not approach a step beyond where he stood; for so doing would have exposed him to view through the windows of the drawing-room whence he knew the sounds to issue. "How powerfully," thought he, "can music reanimate dormant feelings, revive old associations,

and fill the mind with touching sentiments." Meriel's songs, for the greater part, were presents from Fabian; she never sang one twice that was not approved by him. "Doubtless," he pursued, "she is singing now one I gave her; perhaps, one of my own composition. Dearest Meriel! what a voice she has! how mellow, how rich and pure it sounds. Oh, what pathos was in that cadence. I could listen to her for ever." He did not, however, wait a minute longer; but marching past the drawing-room he found Miss Sigismond practising the gamut. She observed him as he went by; but the object of his visit being extremely serious, he stepped on and rang boldly at the bell. Meriel, we say, had seen him; yes, she had seen him and she had guessed with her woman's instinct at the purpose of his call. There was not a minute to be lost; she sprang up in time to intercept Isaac, as he passed through the hall. "Not at home to any one," she said emphatically, then retreated behind the drawing-room door.

"At home?" inquired Fabian, more as matter of form than as putting a question which might be negatived.

"Not at home, sir," replied Isaac, with mild assurance.

"Not at home!" echoed Fabian, in surprise. "Is nobody at home?"

"No, sir, they're all a-driving."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Fabian; then after a short pause, "Take my name in to Miss Sigismond, and ask her if she will see me for a few minutes."

Isaac had no choice but to enter the drawing-room. The whole matter was now so palpable that Meriel, thinking deception neither serviceable nor in good taste, said loud enough for Fabian to hear, "Tell Mr. Harrod, that I am sorry I cannot see him."

"So, so!" muttered Fabian to himself, as he walked away; "I'll know what this means before another twenty-four hours are passed, whip me if I dont! Refused admittance! Why I never heard of such a thing. What the deuce has the silly little witch got into her head now, I wonder? Either she means to throw me over, or else she fancies I'm playing fast and loose with her. Dash it! 'Tis all nonsense going on this way; I'll see Raven, and hear what he advises. Why

life would not be worth five minutes' purchase if I lost Meriel; I might as well go hang myself, at once. Bother these women! Trouble, forsooth, is a pleasure to them, that is, when they cause it. Why the plague can't they run straight.

Fortunately, Raven happened to be at Wildacre when Fabian got there; the object of the call was soon explained.

"So they wouldn't let you in, eh? and Meriel, herself, slammed the door in your face."

F. "Virtually, she did."

R. "But not virtuously. Well! there's an end of it then, I suppose!"

F. "There's an end of that tomfoolery; no end of the other business, if I can help it."

R. "What card do you mean to play next?"

F. "You, if you'll only prove a trump."

R. "You have failed, my dear boy. What chance have I? Suppose you write to her?"

F. "Words are cold-blooded advocates, when love's the matter; but there's nothing else for it, that I see. I wish I had your eloquence, I'd touch her up."

R. "I apprehend she'd find your's the more touching; nevertheless, I can lend you my vocabulary; will you write, or shall I?"

F. "Oh! you know I don't want you to write the letter; it wouldn't be the correct thing exactly, to make love by deputy. If you give me a hint here and there, and lend me a good sentence or two, that's all it would become me to use."

Raven soon provided his friend with pen and ink, and the latter, after about half an hour, which time Raven left him to himself, had finished his appeal, and now called Raven in to listen to the reading of it. Thus it ran:—

"My dear Meriel,—What on earth can have happened, that you should refuse to see me? I have something of the greatest importance to say to you; send me a line by the bearer to say when I can come.

"Ever most affectionately yours,

"FABIAN HARROD.

"P.S. I am the more anxious to see you, as I can't bear to think you should have quarrelled with me; or that you can be annoyed by any stupid accident, of which I am the most inno-

cent cause. Your manner was so unusual on the day of the *fête* (though I should have thought no more of that, if you had not refused to see me), that I really hope you'll treat me like an old friend, your very oldest, and appoint a time when I can relieve my mind from some very *troublesome doubts.* F. H."

"Why," said Raven, "you should have written that epistle upside down; your postscript is twice as long as your letter."

"Do you think it will do, though?" inquired Fabian.

"It might do," returned the other; "when you have been married fifteen years, and are proposing a reconciliation with your wife, which decency obliges you to offer; but which the frigidity of your tones intimates you do not wish her to accept."

"You don't mean that? Why I thought it well over, and it seemed a pretty sensible note, just conveying neither more nor less than what is to the purpose."

"Sensible note! my dear fellow, what in the name of the twelve tribes of Israel, has a lover to do with sensible notes? He might just as

well talk logic to a Guinea-pig, as common sense to a woman in love."

F. "What then am I to say?"

R. "Anything you can think of. Take a hint from honest Sancho; begin with '*Soberana Senora*, and end with *Vuestro hasta la meurte.* Yours till death.' Between the two fill up the space with '*trecientas almas, y vidas, y ojos mios*,' 'my souls, my lifes, my eyes, without end.' I warrant you they'll have a neat effect."

F. "Meriel is not such a fool as you take her for."

R. "She's more of a woman than you take her for."

F. "Well, come, let's hear what you would say to her."

R. "Write, as I tell you. Are you ready? 'My own dearest Meriel.'"

F. "She wont stand that."

R. "Bless you, it will sound commonplace before we get to the end. But write, and don't interrupt me." 'I would have spoken, but you have forced me to write. I know not if what I say will be coherent, for your conduct has driven me to the verge of madness. For years a word has trembled upon my lips which I have not

dared to breathe to you. Despair has often blighted my hopes; but all, save you, has been forgotten when once again we met. A father's curse has hung over my existence, threatening to burst upon me like a thunder cloud, if ever I should speak the thoughts which burned within me. But the hour for wavering is passed; doubts and fears suggested by your conduct have racked me with a torture I can no longer bear. The crisis of my life is come; at your hands I await my sentence.'"

"Zounds, man! I don't want to propose to her by a dirty letter!" interrupted Fabian, dashing his pen to the ground with indignation as he spoke.

"Tut, tut!" cried Raven; "if you wish for an interview, do you fancy she wont perceive what 'tis for? Just as surely will she again refuse you the meeting, and the next time you write she will very properly return the letter. Depend on it this is your only opportunity. I agree with you, it is not the best way of making a proposition."

"But she'll refuse me to a moral certainty, if I aint by to prevent her making such a mistake. As to this letter, she will think I'm a lunatic, that's quite certain."

R. "Take my advice, I'll bear the blame if the affair goes wrong."

F. "What good will that do me? I'd better not run the risk, I think."

R. "Nothing risk, nothing win; trust me, this is your course, and no other."

F. "Well, well, fire away! But I say, don't you think she'll remark that my style is wonderfully altered?"

R. "No woman ever thinks the man commits an extravagance, when she herself is the object of his enthusiasm. Write on; 'The crisis of my life, &c., my sentence. Yes, Meriel, I loved you as a child, I loved you as a boy; but the love of a life is concentrated in the devotion, in the worship I offer now. Oh, my life! my soul!'"

"If she's up in *Don Quixotte*, she'll suspect this," said Fabian.

"Pooh! 'How often, while gazing at the starry firmament above the glowing tropics, has my fancy warmed with the thought that you, too, beheld those distant orbs, and remembered, as I did, they were emblems of eternal constancy. How, in the tempest's roar, in life-struggles by land or ocean, in the

low depression of sickness's fatal fevers, has your angel image hovered over me, inspiring me with courage and dauntless resolution. Think you we were not created for each other? or, that I can live without you? No; rather will I seek some scene of war, some deadly climate, and there—' "

"Can't pledge myself to anything rash," said Fabian, seriously.

"The more you swear in this strain the less you need fear perjury. It would not be amiss to threaten suicide at once. What say you?"

"No, no, no! I must die naturally, whatever comes of it. So let 'deadly climate' stand, 'and there—' "

" 'And there seek refuge in the grave. But why am I inspiring my mind with these alternatives, which your cruelty, nay, your worse than cruelty, your faithlessness can alone draw on me? Oh, Meriel! I I cannot have been so fatally deceived; you cannot, will not cast me from you; you cannot dispel the sweet illusion, that like a golden thread is interwoven through, and so unites our separate beings. Nay, you must, you shall be mine.' "

"How shall I sign?" asked Fabian, looking gravely up.

"Edward Raven," replied the other, with equal gravity.

"I'd better put my own name while I'm about it," said Fabian, laughing at his friend's mistake.

"Ay, ay! what did I say? Fabian Harrod, I meant. Now, considering you are not given to enthusiastic outbursts, I think this will be about the thing; a nice quiet letter, with just sufficient warmth in it to counterbalance the difficulty of your absence. We had better seal and send it at once; the messenger can wait for the answer."

"If it were an invitation to dinner, you couldn't be more calm about it."

"No; I think I bear your suspense with great equanimity; ah! here's Mrs. ——. Get somebody to take this note to Nordefall, and mind that the bearer waits an answer."

CHAPTER VII.

I WOULD give my ears, at least the one I'm deaf by, for a single appropriate motto, apothegm, saw, adage, or truism, to introduce this portion of my tale withal. But the goddess of memory declines the offering, and directs me, with averted countenance, to her natural offspring —Invention. Sweet Fancy!—Hail! I supplicate thy aid. Protect me from the drowsy influence of ponderous stupidity. Inspire my soul with new creative power, and endow its fabrication with the form of Truth!

Alas! how insensibly a man's best intentions lead him to —, when the weakness of his nature reminds him of a want which he cannot supply. As sure as the deed was far from my intention, I was dedicating these concluding chapters to the Father of Lies!

Now, there's no such folly as resolving to go through with a difficulty because a man has got himself entangled in it; nor was I ever more for

cibly struck with the idea, than when, on one occasion ('twas in the town of Bombay), I saw a small green monkey tugging with all its might at a cocoa-nut shell, which was fastened at one end by a string to the roof of a friend's house.

"Prythee," said I, "what is the meaning of all this misunderstanding between that little creature and the nut?"

My friend explained.—"The fact is this," said he; "these animals have an unfortunate instinct which brings them nightly to the house-top, for no better purpose than to tear off its slates or tiles. Yonder is a trap, and the affair is thus contrived:—We partly fill the shell with sugar, but bore the hole, through which the monkey reaches it, so small he cannot withdraw his fist when closed and full. Never till death will the little pilferer relax his hold, and in this way I catch prodigious numbers of his singular race."

"May I deserve a like fate," said I, "if ever I obstinately contend with another difficulty."

"Talking of difficulties," said my Lady B——, "there is but one sure method of

getting the better of temptation, and that's by giving way to it."

'Twas spoken like a woman (for it was little to the point), and ten to one she had a merry life on't. Yet, for all this, I can neither hold to my resolve nor follow hers. This story must be told, and whatever the difficulty, I'd swear the reader thinks the sooner 'tis overcome the better.

With the change of scene, then (we will suppose the scene changed, if you please, to Granstein) several new characters step upon the stage. It were best, I think, that you should know a little of the noble host, after whom a word or two may be said of Dr. Beschafenheit and Mr. Lapwing, though the first, as the whole world knows, is a professor at the German University of ——, the other a natural philosopher, pre-eminently distinguished for his discoveries in pneumatics.

His lordship was the fountain-head of genius, a very nucleus of wit and talent, who possessed neither himself; but herein lay his greater merit. Lord Mountseer was the patron of more sciences than he knew the names of. He encouraged art, supported virtue, relieved poverty, suppressed crime, furthered

education, praised God on every public occasion, in a word, benefited his fellow-beings by every service in his power, all for the trifling reward of being looked upon as the most talented and most benevolent nobleman of his day. In addition to the fame he promised himself by this intimacy with poets and philosophers, he had several times in his life sought that homage which genius has the right to command, by publishing works of his original composition. Amongst these were many Latin poems and two historical plays, entitled, one "The Zenith," another, the "Nadir of the Mountseers." These, however, were only printed on large-paper copies for private circulation. The best known, though perhaps the least read, of his literary labours, is a voluminous work on heraldry, composed in Dutch. The prevailing ignorance of that language may possibly have checked the circulation of this otherwise distinguished performance; though in this surmise I may be mistaken, since its style, no less than its matter, was greeted with the highest praise by nearly all the reviewers of the day. Be the merits of his writings what they might,

the noble author was ever surrounded by discriminating judges who fully appreciated his lordship's taste and talents.

One of his most constant visitors was the German professor, and of all the *savants* who met at Granstein none was more remarkable than Beschafenheit. The profundity of his speculations would alone have placed him above the rank of ordinary intellects. But, abstruse and recondite as his theories and researches were, these were rendered a thousandfold more inscrutable by the wonderful obscurity of his language, a circumstance which procured him the admiration of that very large class who pay the greatest homage to what they least understand, and who, indeed, are of opinion that the highest truths must, on that account, be unintelligible. His pronunciation added not a little to the striking manner of his delivery. But rather than do our philosopher injustice by conveying erroneous impressions of his mode of speaking, it will be better if the reader comprehend the principles on which his words were founded, and on all future occasions supply, by imagination, the tones, &c., which no pen can possibly communicate.

The theory is perfectly simple, and the rule, without exception, is this,—wherever the letters D. C. F. Ph. Sh. occur, the letters T. G. V. D. J. have to be substituted in their steads. We will now give a specimen of Dr. Beschafenheit's philosophy, leaving the reader to conceive the tone by applying the above rule for himself.

"The self-postulated obligation"—the passage is transcribed verbatim, for I believe it to be a very faithful illustration not only of the professor's own philosophy, but of that now generally held by most of the German schools—"The self-postulated obligation of the unifold to the manifold is the primary self-determinating principle of omniunity. For does not omniunison presuppose a peripherical comprehension of every development of the all-manifold realisation of the creative essence? If so, it is obvious that the subdivided and particular evolutions, though possessed of a quasi-self-potensating power, are in reality nothing more than the gradatory manifestations of a self-germinating universally-categorical imperative essence, whose permanent centralizing prevalency suffers no change from

an incessant extermination omnifluent in that spiritualised materiality whose multifold transmutation characterises the supremely sensitive and cosmi-creative organism of the federative universe."

So comprehensive were Dr. Beschafenheit's views, that no single passage can exemplify them; so fecund was his speculative power, that knowledge rather cramped than assisted it, and never was he more voluminous than on those subjects upon which he had bestowed the least reflection.

Cast in a very different mould was the genius of Mr. Lapwing. His mind was just as deeply engrossed with researches into the abstractions of physical philosophy as the other's was with immaterial concerns, and while the studies of the German embraced the mysteries of the universe, those of the Englishman were concentrated upon one single object —the transcendent art of flying! At the present time of his staying at Granstein, he was engaged on the construction of a machine which comprised the results of all his calculations. Lord Mountseer had undertaken the expense of putting together the engine which

was to confer immortal fame upon him and the inventor, and the happy Mr. Lapwing revelled in a Paradise of future renown and canvas flaps and rudders. To those persons who took an interest in the science of æronautics, Lapwing's conversation never failed to be highly instructive and entertaining. Were they already learned about the matter, he would discourse to them on the specific gravities of atmospheric gases; explain, by the theory of dynamics, what velocity a balloon would gain from unobstructed acceleration, how their buoyancy was affected by the weight of apparatus, and how the fluid she contained was affected by oscillating motions, and the like. He would show how resistance was increased by the diameter of the air-vessel, and could prove by algebra that in the descent of parachutes, if A denoted the circumference of the parachute and of the total weight of the machine, the velocity of descent might be expressed in round numbers by $\frac{26}{A}\sqrt{f}$. in feet each second; and consequently the length of the fall which would occasion the same shock would be $\left(\frac{13}{4A}\right)^2$, or very nearly $\frac{10\frac{1}{2}}{A^2}$. f., showing that the resistance of the air is rather greater than

what theory would give, and that it is besides augmented by the concavity of the opposing surface, which occasions an accumulation of the fluid.* On the other hand, when he found his listeners ignorant of these grand principles, he would dilate to them upon the usefulness of air-ships, and upon the history of their invention. He would show how travelling in the air had the advantage over all other modes of progression; how walking was slower, swimming too fatiguing, railways infinitely more dangerous, and ships more nauseating, how horses were liable to stumble and fall, donkeys to kick and stand still, elephants to trample on your body, camels to bruise the person, horned cattle to be soon eaten up as in Abyssinia, lamas to bite the rider, as in Peru, dogs to get foot-sore, as in Lapland, and men to require firing, as in India. He would tell how Archytas, the Greek astronomer, constructed an artificial dove, which, by internal springs, was wafted through the air; what Albertus Magnus and Friar Bacon wrote about flying; and how one Josephus, or Johannes Müller was reported to have exhibited his

* See Hutton's Mathematics

skill before the Emperor Charles the Fifth, but was afterwards discovered to have died sixty years before that monarch reigned; how a poor monk made himself a pair of wings, and attempting to fly from a high tower, broke both his legs and died; how Albert of Saxony, another monk, having inflated some bag or other, made a similar attempt, but failed, because the bag proved heavier than he had calculated on; what Caspar Sholt, the Jesuit did; how Cyrano de Bergerac laughed at them all, and wrote a satire entitled "The Comical History of a Journey to the States of the Sun and Moon," which suggested to Mr. Gulliver the voyages afterwards performed by that distinguished traveller. These, and a host of other things he told them, for, upon this topic he had not his match in the whole world.

CHAPTER VIII.

It took Miss Sigismond about two hours to answer Fabian's letter. But, oh! let us not profane the heart-suspending emotions which swell a lover's soul at the moment he receives his doom, without first preparing our minds for joy or sorrow. Bethink you what a moment it must have been when the cream-laid messenger of life and death was placed in our lover's hands—hands that so trembled they could scarcely break the seal—hands that fumbled so they could hardly detach the letter from its cover. Raven stood motionless as a statue, but deciphering the astonished look on the young man's face; for with the letter there came a parcel, and well might Fabian be astounded, for forth from the parcel came his miniature and a lock of hair. But the letter—the letter! Are you not panting to see the letter? Good gentlefolk dispel your curiosity, for little in the world must

you have lived an the stereotype of this be yet a stranger to you.

"My dear Mr. Harrod—I cannot express to you how very pained I am by the contents of your letter. That I was as much surprised as grieved I need scarcely assure you. Remembering, as I was *brought up* to remember, the particular nature of our long and *sincere* friendship, the expressions you have now made use of have caused me the profoundest regret. If my behaviour has at any time *annoyed you* I am most heartily sorry. But if for a moment I ever fancied your manner betrayed sentiments *it was not in my power* to return, I thought it would be only *cruel kindness* to mislead or deceive you as to the real *truth.* I must entreat you to forgive me for so *unhappily* crossing your path; but, at the same time, I must beg of you not to attempt to alter my decision, as any such attempt would only be attended with the greatest annoyance to my father, and consequently to myself. When *bygones* are *bygones* I sincerely hope we may meet again *as friends;* but until such is the case, your own good sense and kind feeling will, I am sure, spare *me* the pain of encoun-

tering you. I leave this to-morrow for Granstein; but wherever I am, or wherever you are, my prayers will always be with you.

"Believe me, truly yours,

"MERIEL SIGISMOND."

"There's no mistake about that," said Fabian; "is there?"

"A mistake from first to last," said Raven. "But, what's this? She has sent her miniature to console you for the loss of the original."

"*Her* likeness!" exclaimed the astonished Fabian, "why, here is my own!"

"Which, if you sent, I am not surprised that she should return."

"I send it! Do you think me mad? I send this miniature? Now, by heaven! when a man's own father plays him a trick like this, 'tis time the son—"

"Should disinherit him," said Raven. "And the lock of hair—where does that come from?"

"It matters not," said Fabian, his face flushing with indignation; "easy as they have found me hitherto, henceforth my resolution will prove a match for their chicanery."

"Bravely said, and dutifully; but Meriel's decision, is *that* to stand for nought?"

"If prompted by the supposition that I am capable of this indelicacy, I wonder not at her decision. But she must know the truth, and I must then hear from her own lips that she does not care for me, before I obey her orders."

"And until you get this bitterest intelligence from the sweetest source, you mean to set her wishes at defiance?"

"Sure," said Fabian, "you would not have me leave her to think I had been so hardy—so audacious and unmannerly—as to send my likeness and my hair unasked, before even I had intreated her to confess her love?"

"She would forgive this," said Raven, coolly, "and more, too, if she loved; she could not help herself. But where's the letter? Let's see, if we can, what it really means."

"Can you make anything of it?"

"Yes," said Raven, "precisely anything. See here—'I cannot,' says she, 'express how pained I was by your letter;' that might mean, because she could not accept an offer she had so long sighed for. 'I was as much surprised as grieved,' means nothing but that

delicacy in a woman's eyes is always worth more than truth."

'*Sincere* friendship,' read Fabian, looking over Raven's shoulder. "You see 'sincere' is underlined; this shows some warmth, at all events."

"Yes," said Raven, "and '*brought up*' is also dashed; that looks warm, too, doesn't it? '*Annoyed* you;' come, that's better."

"How better?" said Fabian.

"'Tis facetious—bitter rather. Yes; that's in your favour. But 'if I for a moment,' &c. —another fib. Do you think a man can make such an ass of himself as a lover does, and a woman not find him out? Ah! here's a sentence—underlined too—whose meaning, if we knew it, would solve the riddle. '*Sentiments it was not in my power to return.*'"

"Well," said Fabian, "there's a good deal implied in that—eh?"

"A good deal," returned Raven, "and next to nothing said. I daresay I could give you as many turnings to the words as Churchmen put constructions on the Bible, and with as much advantage to my audience, maybe. But still, to compare small things with great,

the whole and not the part is the matter for your judgment. To me the letter conveys one simple idea—old Sigismond is your enemy. Touching the girl's affection, I venture no opinion; that you must discover as best you may."

"There is but one way," said Fabian.

"Which is?"

"To see her. But this is not so easy. She leaves Nordefall to-morrow, and before then my father and I go for a fortnight to ——shire. The day after our return he proceeds to Granstein. My only chance, therefore, is to leave ——shire, if possible, sooner than he, and to see her ere he joins the Mountseer party. If I fail in my first expedition, I shall make some discoveries which will serve me for another."

"Fortes fortuna adjuvat," said Raven; "or, as Hudibras hath it,

> 'Fortune th' audacious doth juvare,
> But lets the timidous miscarry.'"

CHAPTER IX.

Poor Meriel! she was very unhappy at leaving home, nor was she a whit happier when she got to Granstein; one only reflection consoled her, she had done her duty, and this is a never-failing consolation. Yes! gratifying as it is to indulge vanity; soothing as it is, for the moment, to give way to passion; sweet as it is to buoy up the mind with prospects of distant hope; luxurious as it is to revel in grief; satisfactory as it may be to gloat on revenge; flattering to pride ourselves on fortitude; diverting to plunge into excitement; the balm of a good conscience is worth them all, and they are all worthless. How worthless the stricken heart that has groaned and writhed with agony, and has turned at last to God, alone most terribly, most sweetly has experienced.

A week passed away, Fabian still kept at home; but the time wore heavily on with Miss Sigismond. Lapwing did amuse her,

it is true; and she was so full of native fun she could not help laughing, now and then, at the German doctor. Her old ally, Raven, joined the party a few days after her arrival. He, in fact, occupied her thoughts more than any there, for she suspected shrewdly he was in Fabian's confidence. His manner confirmed this impression. He became so gentle, kind and sympathizing. When she was disposed to talk he was at her side directly, exerting his conversation to distract her mind, or meet her humour. Still it was a painful pleasure to be in his company. It reminded her so vividly of Fabian, and cancelled continuously the efforts she as continuously made to keep him from her thoughts. There was, however, another affair that troubled her very much as her stay went on at Granstein. This was the marked way in which Lord Mountseer's eldest son paid his addresses to her. No matter how cold and discouraging she was; he seemed to grow more in love with her every hour; his behaviour was entirely gentlemanlike. In her presence he was all attention and respect. The amusements of the day, of which he had the control, were entirely guided

by her wishes; not that she had a wish in the matter; but every trifle was referred to her, quite unobtrusively, still unintentionally to the last degree. Accidently she admired a St. Bernard's dog. A day or two after, he begged her acceptance of it in a manner which left it impossible for her to decline; he had had a silver collar made for the dog with her name and Nordefall Priory engraven upon it. There was something in this simple addition of the Nordefall Priory that touched her. There was a designed delicacy, so she fancied, in connecting her name in permanent characters with her own home, which her womanly niceness thoroughly appreciated. Then he became so subdued before her, she quite pitied him for his love.

One day a circumstance occurred which gave the young viscount a splendid occasion for exhibiting the ardour of his devotion. Miss Sigismond and her father had borrowed the pony-chair to visit an old friend of his in the neighbourhood. In their road lay a railway, which they were obliged to cross. Now, it happened when they came to the line of rails the pony took it into

his head that this would be a favourable opportunity to display his tricks. Seeing what the creature would be at, Mr. Sigismond snatched the reins out of Meriel's hands, and falling into a violent passion jobbed the beast in the mouth till its anger waxed as obstinate as his own. In the heat of this broil the gate-keeper called to them from the other side of the road, to draw back, for a train was shortly coming, as its smoke over the first bend in the line now clearly indicated. Upon this intelligence Meriel begged leave to have the reins back again; but Mr. Sigismond, being very much alarmed at the approach of danger, was seized with such nervous apprehensions that his presence of mind forsook him with no less speed than that of the screaming monster then tearing madly on its way. The situation of the pony-chair and its precious contents now became dreadfully critical, for, very inopportunely, the little animal was taken with a sudden desire to cross the road, and strove to accomplish this impracticable feat with the same determination it before opposed to it. Meriel, whom terror inspired with marvellous clearness of percep-

tion, comprehended the fatality of a single step in advance. She frantically grasped the reins; but with all her strength could not restrain the pony. On flew the engine, whose piercing shrieks sounded like the wild warnings of a destroying demon. A moment more, mangled and shapeless masses would have strewn the road. But at the very crisis a figure darted in front of the train. With surprising force and rapidity the apparition struck the pony a staggering blow. This threw it upon its haunches; and like a snorting dragon the rattling convoy flew unheeding by.

Who Meriel thought had saved them, when she had recovered sufficiently to think at all, or what she thought had happened to their protector, is not worth considering. When the train had gone by, Lord Granstein was seen lying upon the ground, where he had, with wonderful self-possession, thrown himself, and where the carriages had passed over him without doing him the smallest injury; you may be sure this incident did not diminish Meriel's embarrassment, with respect to a courtship she knew not how to escape. As the affair

got wind it came to be the talk of the whole county that the heir of Granstein, one of the greatest matches in England, was dying, and, indeed, had nearly suffered death, for the love of Miss Sigismond. His lordship's case became so desperate that his mother even gave up thinking of either of the other schemes, and set her heart upon his marrying where he wished. At the dinner or breakfast-table no one dreamt of taking the vacant seat at Meriel's side. By common understanding and consent it was left for the love-sick young man. These things were in themselves sufficiently distressing to poor Meriel, whose affections, whatever other means she might employ to tranquillise them, were certainly not diminished by the comparisons which the addresses of one lover forced her to make with those of another. But the whole burden of vexation, laid upon her by these troubles, was insignificant when compared with her father's behaviour. With the utmost delicacy and fondness he could not control the eagerness of his wishes to see some evidence of his child's oblivion of the old attachment, in her yielding to the influences of a new one.

The connexion with the Mountseers was, in his eyes, as much to be desired as that with the Harrods was to be deprecated. He watched, as long as blindness would permit him, every movement of the young couple, courted Lord Granstein's presence every time he could by so doing bring him in contact with the girl. If she endured this courtship with patience the old gentleman's joy was inexpressible; if, on the other hand, she turned abruptly away, Mr. Sigismond was downcast for the rest of the day. Indeed, he permitted himself to be so overpowered and fidgetted by his anxiety on this score, that it very visibly affected his health, and succeeded, at last, in alarming Meriel on his account.

In a country establishment, where people are living pretty nearly as intimately as a family of rabbits in a huge burrow, the prevailing interests more or less concern the whole community. This was so at Granstein, and but for the philosophers who were propped up by their own meditations, and occasionally gave a diverting turn to the general spirit, an unpleasant gloom would, by

degrees, have got possession of the house. As, however, the completion of Mr. Lapwing's machine approached, this gentleman's excitement conveyed animation to all the guests. He and Dr. Beschafenheit were engaged in discussing aeronautics in the warmest manner in every place and time. The professor could not leave Lapwing at rest, even when the latter was engaged in the workshop; but must needs be at him with a thousand suggestions, not a tithe of which the other had a chance of responding to. Poor Lapwing was completely dumbfounded sometimes, with the volubility of the German professor; and though his long and laborious study of pneumatics had made him better acquainted with their practical application than perhaps any man living, Dr. Beschafenheit's schemes were so extraordinary, and were so ingeniously mixed up with theories which had no connection whatever with the subject, that had Lapwing been as obtuse as he was clear-headed, he could not possibly have been more mystified.

"It is useless to talk to me, Dr. Beschafenheit," Mr. Lapwing would exclaim, "about your triple dimensions and resistances, your

superficieses, and your motions. I tell you, my good sir, unless the motive power which exists in the pectoral muscle of birds can be supplied by some artificial machinery—such as I have here invented—the weight of so large a surface of sail as is necessary to float and assist the propulsion of the vessel, must subject it to the irresistible laws of gravitation. Let me explain to you the complex action of this—"

"My tear Lapvings," interposed the Doctor, "Lige der gemust (chemist) der philosover disgovers gonnexion only trew (through) zolution, die vorkings of unrestrained nature through the torture of art; also, to gatch der tranzient abbearance, he must pind ut (it) in die vetters of rule, he must dissect its peuterful (beautiful) pody, and must preserve its living spirit in a boor selegtion of vords."

For the clearer understanding of the reader we shall proceed to give the doctor's language without his peculiarity of pronunciation.

"No wonder, then, that you do not understand me," he continued. "For inasmuch as every creative power, even to the ultimate

atoms, produces repletion of the given space, the organic etherial investure of the mind is complete with any one of its own creations, so that your conception being entirely occupied with thoughts of your own machine, your zetetick faculties are thus transmuted into the aporetick; and it follows that your whole state gradually becomes an epthetick one."

"I know nothing of your emetics," cries Lapwing, "nor do I see how they apply to my machine. As to my head being so full of it as to prevent me understanding you, such is not the case, doctor. For if your language was a shade more simple, and referred in any way (practically that is) to the affair in hand, I know of no reason why I should not be able to answer you. My argument began by defending the application of a power, such as the one I have here constructed, and which to-morrow you and all here present will have the opportunity of admiring."

"I tell you, Lapving," returned the other, "what with your levers here, and your flaps there, your tail behind, and your great outrigger, thirty feet long, you will come to the ground again sooner as you get off it. There

is but one way to navigate the air. The principle is this—nothing can be more simple, though first it must be granted that, with respect of motion, when a thing is moved it must be supposed to move in place. For if you infer that nothing can be moved, neither in the place wherein it is, nor in the place wherein it is not—"

"Mercy on us, good Dr. Beschafenheit," quoth Lapwing, in despair, "let us suppose anything you please; but tell me in what way it is you mean to fly."

"The principle is this, a balloon will not rise, because the atmosphere is denser."

"Lighter," popped in the jealous aeronaut, glad to catch the other tripping.

"Lighter or denser, denser or lighter, all the same."

"Not at all, not all!" insisted Lapwing.

"Well! that depends on the language," pursued the doctor. "Not so heavy, you know, as below. Therefore, suppose your air was lighter as that above, your balloon would ascend; is it not so?"

"Unquestionably," admitted Lapwing.

"Then," cries the doctor, "if you go to the

top of the highest mountains, and take with you a bag of a good large size, say of about a mile in circumference, and fill this with the fine diffuse air of the upper regions, most unquestionably you will be provided with a fluid that will blow you up as easily as gas."

"Pish!" exclaimed the other, "I see not the smallest use in taking all this trouble to find a substitute that will not answer half the purposes of gas itself. But really, doctor, you must allow me to put the finishing touches to my vessel. For I have promised the ladies to have it ready for them by to-morrow, and there is still much to be done."

With this Mr. Lapwing set himself earnestly to work at the air-ship. And Dr. Beschafenheit left him for a stroll in the gardens; scarcely a quarter of an hour had elapsed, however, before the professor's perigrinations brought him again to the aeronaut's workshop, and entering in he very soon inveigled Lapwing into a tremendously lengthy discussion, which lasted half the afternoon. Instead of transcribing this, however, we must lend our attention to other affairs, which, when told, will, I trust, speak for their own importance.

CHAPTER X.

During the fortnight spent by the Harrods in ——shire, not a syllable had been exchanged between them on the subject always uppermost in the thoughts of both. When it is considered, however, what one had already done and what the other intended to do, it will not be surprising that such should be the case. For however great the relief afforded by a confession of sins, the relief is but imperfect, unless the confessee, has some reliance in the sympathy of the confessor; and though in many cases a sense of mutual culpability makes the confessor more charitable and better able to administer either the fittest correction, or the properest balm, to the sinner's wounded conscience, still where, as it now and then will happen, and as it happened here, the guilty person has neither faith in the listener's condolence nor the feeblest belief in his honesty, it is seldom that any acknowledgment what-

ever passes between them. Neither Nordefall, nor Granstein, nor Belinda, nor Meriel, nor marriage in any way so ever was mentioned.

As he had planned, Fabian found some excuse to slip away before his father, and on the evening of his return to Darsingham, equipped himself for his trip to Granstein.

Where shall we look, in what history, romance, or poem, ballad or minstrel's lay, for the pattern of a lover sallying forth to release a captured maid? Wilt thou for thyself, fair reader, conjure up the semblance of some—

"Gentle Knight a pricking o'er ye plaine,"

clad in complete steel, with plumed crest, astride his prancing charger, bedecked in all the panoply of war? If thou wilt not it is no matter, for such a picture would, least of any, present our Fabian to your fancy. Behold him clothed in fustian shooting-jacket—in fustain dittos I should have said—his steed, a rough Welsh pony that scarce could keep his lengthy legs from off the ground.

At first, the night was fine, 'twas yet early, and ere the sun had set an hour, the moon shone bright, though now and then obscured

by fleeting vapour. Before he had gone half way a few drops of rain began to fall, and the clouds increased so much as to quite shut out the moon's fair light. This was all he wished for, and never could lover, with so much to make him anxious, be more hopeful and merry than he. He sang and whistled on his way, as though it had led to a merry meeting; one idea ousted every care; he was approaching the dearest spot on earth to him—Meriel's abode for the time being, and come what might, his was not the character to despair. When he came to the village of Granstein, the church clock struck half-past nine; most of the villagers were gone to bed; but Fabian, who knew many of them, (for his tutor, Mr. Pilgrim's curate, had lived near this,) had a mind to see whether the disguise he had had the precaution to assume, would be seen through. The trial he made of it proved the perfect success of his disfigurement, which gave him all the appearance of a rough vagabondish fellow. Satisfied on this score, he jogged on to the boundaries of the park; here he dismounted, and tying his pony fast to a tree, climbed the palings, and strode onward towards the house.

The darkness now, though it favoured his design, hindered the rapidity of his progress; still, the lights in the Castle soon became visible, and these directed his steps. It was not without a beating heart that he reconnoitered the ground, casting his eyes upon every window whence shone a light. He had no very definite idea of what he might be called on to do, yet he came prepared for anything, and a glimpse of Meriel, which he perhaps half expected to catch, would, for aught he could tell, decide his movements. Not a soul was stirring without the house, so he walked round, taking care to keep on the grass, not to make any noise by treading on the gravel. He listened first at one side, then another; but being guided at last by the sounds of revelry, he found the party had not yet left the dining-room; this being down stairs he crept along under the windows, and in breathless eagerness strained his ears with the foolish and extravagant hope of distinguishing the notes of Meriel's voice. He was in the very act of listening, when—but one minute to take things in their proper order.

By accident it happened, that as Fabian was

tying his pony to a tree, a man, whose business was to watch over the tender lives of Lord Mountseer's pheasants, passed by the spot on the inside of the rails, when he saw Fabian climb the palings and enter the park; his suspicions were fully roused, and he resolved to dog in silence the steps of the trespasser. Not a movement did Fabian make, therefore, but the sturdy keeper was following at his heels, stealthily as any panther. It first occurred to the man, when he found that Fabian took a line and pursued it with haste straight for the Castle, that the trespasser was no more than a friend to some servant there. But when Fabian drew near to the house, his manner of advancing betrayed such evident cautiousness and fear of detection, that these symptoms at once doubled the mistrust and watchfulness of the keeper. The examination of the windows, the listening, every act of Fabian's in short convinced him, not that the stranger was a poacher, as he had once suspected, but worse, a housebreaker. Had this functionary used a little more intelligence, and trusted a little less to the brute force he was accustomed solely to rely upon, he would have bided his time until the sup-

posed robber committed a more overt act than mere examination of the premises. But inspired with the simple idea of preventing villany, he stole up behind Fabian and grasping the collar of his fustian jacket, asked in a resolute voice, "what he wanted there?" The quick and equally polite response was "what the devil is that to you?"

"You've no business here," says the keeper, "so you mun jist come along with me."

Fabian, who did not wish to hurt the man, but only desired to escape detection, struck heavily at his arrestor's arm; so ready however was the other for this attempt, that it utterly failed to shake him off; and to prevent a second effort of a similar kind, he brought his cudgel full swing upon Fabian's head. The blow caught the young gentleman over his left eye cutting the brow to the bone, letting flow a considerable stream of blood. This so stunned the stricken man, he could not offer any further resistance; but suffered himself to be led, almost ere he knew what he submitted to, into a place called the gun-room, situated amongst the outdoor offices, and allotted expressly to the use of the keepers. Here his

captor locked him safely in, until he had sent to inform Lord Mountseer that a desperate ruffian had been taken (as the butler, with breathless pomposity assured his lordship) in the very act of breaking into the plate-room. The announcement created no small sensation amongst the company.

"What an audacious ruffian he must be!" cries one.

"I wonder if he meant to murder anybody," says Belinda.

"Gracious! we might have all been ——," a proper word of horror, the widow lady who spoke could not find—

"Yes, indeed," cried a venerable spinster, "and I shall take very good care to put the poker and tongs against my windows for the future."

"He's some poor fellow come to beg," was Raven's contemptuous remark; he half guessed what had really happened. "Shall I go and see who he is?"

"No, no! I'll see him myself," returned Lord Mountseer, with dignified magisterial air.

"Do let's have him up here papa, dear," begged his lordship's favourite daughter; "I

should so like to see a real live house-breaker."

"Oh yes, yes, have him in sir," echoed a couple of Lady Grace's admirers.

"We can form a bench and commit him at once," exclaimed Parson Porteus, with a chuckle, which turned the wine in his nose a livelier purple.

"Eh! what say you? suppose we do have him up then; one never knows what dependence to place in any man's judgment but one's own. I daresay my butler speaks '*ut homunculus probabilia conjectura sequens*,' as Cicero says."

Meriel looked anxiously towards Lady Mountseer, hoping to see her make the sign of departure; which, however, she did not make till the question was settled, and the culprit brought to the ante-chamber, through which the ladies had to pass on their way to the drawing-room. It was an anxious moment for Fabian, when he stood waiting to be summoned into the presence of a number of people to whom, as he supposed, he was more or less known; but there was no getting out of the scrape now; his only chance was to pass for the character they apprehended him for, and

of this he entertained an excellent hope; for his former disguise, which the villagers satisfactorily tested, was rendered much more impenetrable by a large cotton handkerchief, which the cook lent him, and which was bound round his head, completely covering one side of his face, as well as the whole of its upper part. The blood, too, had trickled down, staining his whiskers and beard, though these he had trimmed and altered in shape to suit his general transformation. This disfigurement, added to the old fustian suit, and the suspicions preconceived of his character, were all mightily in his favour; yet had he his voice to change no less than his looks, and should he even succeed at first, this success would place him in a still more inextricable position, if discovery by accident were to follow. Nothing daunted, however, his was a courage which rose with the difficulties and dangers it encountered, and a wit whose resources were always best drawn forth by urgency, Fabian revolved in his mind the best way of meeting each possible contingency, clinging always to the one main object of converting any accident into an opportunity of communicating with his beloved. His anxiety at

last reached its culmination; the door opened and the ladies passed in review. Each, as they hurried by, cast a half-terrified, half-curious glance upon him. But, (and explain to me if thou canst what presentiment is, whether it is more lively in the breasts of lovers, whether fear has anything to do with it, whether some mesmeric influence pervades us all, and connects those minds most intimately whose thoughts are most constantly dwelling upon the same ideas?) when Meriel came opposite to him, she, like the rest, turned her eyes upon him; and whether in consequence of presentiment—who can tell—instantly—yes, instantly recognised him.

We have once seen her faint, on a much less trying occasion than this; to have done so now would have been imprudent in the extreme; she neither fainted therefore, nor screamed; nor by any word, action or look, let any soul, not even Fabian himself, perceive that she was at that moment as well aware of his actual presence in the flesh, as she was at all other times conscious of his virtual presence in the spirit. She passed on and said nothing. Touching the state of mind this extraordinary apparition threw her into, I leave any of my

lady readers to imagine what is quite out of my power to describe.

"Well, keeper," began Lord Mountseer, "where did you take this man, and what was he doing, eh? Speak up, my man, I can't hear what you say." One glance round the room was enough to acquaint Fabian with the identity of those he confronted. Fortunately for him, Granstein had left the dining-table with the ladies, though I doubt, if he had staid, whether he would have been (in his present melancholy condition) sufficiently interested to detect his friend; and Mr. Sigismond's blindness prevented his seeing who it was. There were no others besides Raven (Raven at once knew him) who had met Fabian since his return from America, where growth of a beard and moustache had alone greatly altered him.

"He was prowling about the house, my lord," was the answer to the above question.

"What does he say?" inquired Mr. Porteus, with his hand behind his ear, and straining a good deal.

"Prowling about," repeated Lord Mountseer, mysteriously.

"Ah! I see," said Porteus, satisfied.

"Pray, my man," said Lord Mountseer, "what do you intend to signify by that expression of yours, '*prowling* about?'"

"Well, my lord, he was stealing about, as one might say."

"What, what?" exclaimed Porteus, with both hands behind his ears.

"Stealing about," repeated Lord Mountseer.

"Oh! stealing, was he?" returned Porteus, "and what was he stealing, keeper?"

"He wasn't stealing anything, sir."

"Now do speak up," whined Mr. Porteus, beseechingly, "I cannot hear a word you say."

The keeper explained.

"Then," inquired Lord Mountseer, "if he was not stealing, what was he doing?"

Here the magistrates were told what the reader already knows. It was no easy matter to put Mr. Porteus in possession of the whole case. When he did understand it, he said—

"Now, my lord, here is an established fact of burglary."

"Do you not think," said Raven to his lordship, "the prisoner had better be removed while the matter is being discussed; his wound bleeds profusely."

The question was referred to Porteus—

"Impossible," cried he, "we must examine the witness. But, as I was saying, this is an established fact of burglary—'*Burglary,*' says Burns, '*is a felony at common law, in breaking and entering the mansion house of another in the night, with intent to commit some felony within the same, whether the felonious intent be executed or not.*'"

"What is the penalty attending conviction," observed Lord Mountseer.

"That every person convicted of burglary, shall suffer death as a felon," was the clergyman's ready answer.

"Pardon me," said Raven, "I do not see wherein this young man's guilt lies; there is no evidence of his having any *intent* whatever to commit felony. I think," he said, addressing the keeper, "your zeal has made you a little hasty in this affair."

"When he struck me," was the answer, "I feared he'd be off, or get the mastery, if I didn't use violence."

"Oh, he struck you first, did he?" exclaimed Mr. Porteus. "What! I suppose, he struck you with the butt end of a pistol, eh?"

"No, sir, he struck me with—"

"Ah! with a cutlass, then; it's all the same, pistol or cutlass, both are mentioned."

"Beg pardon, sir, this stick, (the blackthorn was produced,) is all he had about him; but 'twas with his fist, I think, as he struck me."

"What did you strike that man for?" inquired the peer of Fabian.

"Because," returned the prisoner, in a smothered voice, "he collared me."

"And what were you doing at the time 'he collared' you?"

"Remember!" exclaimed Raven, in a well-feigned tone of harshness, "any answer you make now, will be taken down against the day of your trial!"

"Then I shan't say nothing more," sulkily growled the culprit.

"A strong evidence of his guilt," whispered Porteus to the peer.

"I am afraid so!" Lord M. shook his head. "But on what grounds," he added, "will the indictment stand?"

"Stand?" echoed the other.

"Ay!" said Raven; "what clause of the law does this offence come under?"

"I will show you in one minute, my dear

sir," cries Porteus; "first, let us consider the term *breaking*, used in the definition before cited. 'If,' says Burns, 'the door of a mansion house stand open and the thief enter, this is not breaking; so, if the window of the house be open and a thief, with a hook or other engine draweth out some of the goods of the owner this is no burglary, because there is no actual breaking of the house. If, again—' "

"These," interposed Raven, "seem to be definitions of what burglary is *not*. It would, perhaps, save time if we learnt what burglary is."

"Well, upon my word, sir," blustered Mr. Porteus, filling his glass with a bumper of port wine, as an explicative, "upon my word you take a person up very short; I have been near five-and-twenty years on the bench, sir, and—"

"I humbly crave your forgiveness, Mr. Porteus," said Raven, "but pray do not let any anxiety on my part to prevent an irrelevant and tedious discussion interfere with what you were going to say."

"Well then, my lord, I will mention, with Mr. Raven's *permission* (!) what burglary

is. 'The following acts, according to Burns, amount to *breaking;* picking a lock, breaking a window, or unlatching a door. If, also, a thief enter by the chimney it is breaking; for that to —'"

"Not applicable, Porteus, not applicable here," said Lord Mountseer.

"If my memory serves me," joined Raven, "there must be either fraud or conspiracy, or violence used in order to obtain an entrance; or else there must be an actual breach of some part of the house to constitute burglary."

"A burglary" insisted Porteus, "may be committed by breaking and entering churches, and the walls and gates of a walled town; thus they are burglars, who break any house or church in the night, although they take nothing away."

"Ah! the night, yes, I remember; that is an important feature in the case, no doubt," said Lord Mountseer, seriously. "If the act be committed after the *crepusculum* (Pliny and Ovid both use the word) it of course must be by night; and certainly the *crepusculum* had passed when we sat down to dinner."

Raven now saw, that the only likelihood

of getting the prisoner dismissed, was to stop the trial by siding with Mr. Porteus. "I think on the whole," said he, "Mr. Porteus is perfectly right. The prisoner is clearly guilty of burglary, and the sooner he is committed the better."

"No doubt of it," rejoined the clergyman; "setting other considerations apart, this cudgel here is enough for our purpose; for by Stat. 5, G. IV. 'Every person in possession of any crow, jack, bit, or other implement, with *intent* to break and enter any dwelling house, &c., or being armed with gun, hanger, *bludgeon*, &c., and every person being found in or upon any coach-house, stable, *garden*, &c., shall be deemed a rogue and vagabond within the true intent of this act.'"

"That's quite conclusive, don't you think so, Mr. Raven?" asked Lord Mountseer.

"Oh, quite, I think; now, I presume, you will confine the rascal in some secure place for the night."

"Yes," returned the other; "there's nothing further to be done; to-morrow we'll send him to gaol."

His lordship then proceeded to give instruc-

tions for the prisoner's confinement, and to prevent the possibility of so desperate a character escaping, ordered the butler to bring him the key after he had locked the culprit up.

"Well, papa," began Lady Grace, the moment the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, "what did you make out? Is he a housebreaker, a robber, or a murderer?"

The ladies gathered round, all showing the greatest curiosity, excepting Meriel, whose ears and heart were throbbing to catch every syllable as it fell.

"A housebreaker, clearly," was the verdict, "and a most desperate fellow, too," exclaimed Porteus.

"And what's the sentence papa, dear? will he be transported, or hanged, or what?"

"Hanged, I fear;" replied her father.

"Hanged, I hope;" echoed Porteus.

"How dreadful!" muttered Lady Mountseer, turning her eyes to heaven.

"Mine Cot!" exclaimed the German; "he would be an egsellent subject to oberate upon lebendig."

"What mean you, now doctor?" said Lapwing.

"Mean?" says the other, "why dis, I mean, dat de seat of de soul will never be disgovered, until it is lawful to dissect criminals alive; I would not wish a finer subject for experiment, as this long-legged teufle!"

"A practice used by the ancients," observed Lord Mountseer; "but remarkably barbarous."

"And where is he now," inquired Belinda; "in the Castle keep?"

"No;" returned his lordship; "I have ordered him to be shut up in the coal cellar, for there is no escape thence, except by the door. The key is to be brought to me. Ah! here it is; now I shall lock it up in my little key-box here; let him conjure it out of that if he can."

CHAPTER XI.

Not a word of the foregoing dialogue escaped Meriel; she drank it in as the sand soaks up rain, and showed as little trace of what had fallen. How great a relief was it to her, poor child, to see the party disperse, and to find herself alone in her room! But, again, what a torrent of perplexing thoughts deluged her senses when the necessity of self-control being removed, she would turn her whole attention to the hundred possible accidents which the affair might give birth to, all equally eventuating in exposure. What disgrace to Fabian! What terrible provocation and distress to her father! And for herself, language cannot paint the terrors which nervousness, past harrassment, and, above all, native delicacy threw her into. The least evil she could distinguish in the throng which threatened her, was the utter annihilation now of every secret hope she might have clung to of a future arrangement of difficulties. This, she thought, must settle

the matter for ever. Her father might be thrown into a severe illness by it; and in her ignorance of the law, she positively did not know but that her lover might, by its intricacies, be actually found guilty of a crime which, supposing detection to be deferred, would keep him for months shut up as a felon in gaol. As one thought succeeded to another, each seemed more terrifying than its parent; at last, her state almost bordered on distraction, her very brain seemed curdling with perplexity. In this condition a sudden idea insinuated itself. What if she could set him free. She knew where he was confined. She knew where the key of his prison lay. At the dead of night she might release him, restore the key to its place, and let who could discover the secret of his escape. There was one obstacle insurmountable, it seemed, to this plan. The key was enclosed in a small box which fastened with a Bramah lock. A common lock might have been picked, or opened by some of her own keys, but with this one the box was impenetrable; still there was no other loophole for hope. Be the result what it might, the stratagem must be tried. Then

came other qualms when this point was settled. The meeting. Was such boldness not unfeminine? What would Fabian think of her conduct? Would she be able to show him that what she wished was to spare her father, to obviate the suspicion of connivance which discovery might give rise to, to spare him from the humiliation and ridicule of detection? would he understand, in a word, that she had been driven to so daring a step to avoid the exposure threatened by his rashness, and not that she came with any latent disposition to see him, or merely extricate him from difficulties which his folly had justly brought him into? Again, supposing—this was the most terrifying supposition of any—supposing she should be surprised, taken, key or box in hand, for whom might she not meet on the way from her room to his prison? or how would she be able to turn bolts and bars, without disturbing the servants? The answers to these questions, when suggested by a heated imagination, were fraught with the direst terrors; and, again, she sunk down and sobbed with vexation and despair. Soon, however, the fear of what the morrow would bring forth

reanimated her courage, she took a turn or two in her chamber, and resolved, at last, to make the attempt forthwith. It was about an hour from the time the party had dispersed that Meriel left her room, and made her way to the drawing-room. Her senses were painfully on the alert to catch the first sounds or sight of any one moving. Before entering the drawing-room she paused to listen, and though at first she could neither distinguish the voices, nor the meaning of their sounds, she plainly heard a conversation going on within. Placing her cheek close to the panel she listened, and as the voices were raised, just caught, from time to time, these broken sentences.

First voice.—"Would be attended with great insecurity and danger."

Second voice.—"In a vertical position his escape would then be easy."

First voice.—"By no man who valued his life—one of the most daring acts on record—none but (*name inaudible*) would have the courage, or rather, the desperation."

Second voice.—"I say by having a cord—let himself down."

First voice.—"Must infallibly be hanged—nothing can save him."

Second voice.—"There would be no need to fear ——, these precautions unnecessary, if the escape (*inaudible*) properly managed."

First voice.—"How could it be managed?" Meriel here listened with the utmost eagerness, the answer was very emphatic. "Mine Cot! As I telled you before, by a stob cog!" (stop-cock.) This reply seemed to have the effect of concluding the argument, which, judging from the contest, probably referred either to parachutes or balloons.

The voices now sounded close to the door, and Meriel had only just time to extinguish her candle, and dart behind a window-curtain as the two philosophers passed her on their way to bed. When they were gone she was entirely in the dark, for so warm had been their discussion they had suffered the fire to burn quite out.

The absence of light, however, did not affect her recollection of the box's locality, so accurately had interest impressed it on her observation. With some groping about, therefore, in the course of which, poor little thing, she gave herself two or three nasty bruises, she

finally obtained possession of the treasure, and hastened with it back to her own room.

A successful move in a difficult undertaking, which once seemed all impracticable, emboldens expectation with assurance, in proportion as before it was crushed by despondency. Great were the exultations of her spirit when Meriel felt that only four thin slips of wood kept her hands from the instrument of delivery. She tried her little bunch of keys; none, of course, would fit. She therefore shook the box to refresh her courage with the rattle of its contents. Split quills, she had heard, would sometimes open Bramah locks;—very soon all her pens were split to pieces. Her hair-pins followed the same fate, both implements proving simply useless. "Mercy on me!" she began to think, "what will Lord Mountseer do if this box be injured? What if he knew some one was breaking open his secret casket? The crime of such an act is nameless. 'Tis too late though to go back now. Here's the box, and here rattle the keys; the box once open, the key once out, and—stop! a knife, a knife might force either hasp or bolt. Ah! yes, the spring yields—it almost does—a little—the least bit more. Broken! and how

am I to get it out?" At the box she mutely stared! then turned her fixed, unconscious gaze about the room; thinking, but not seeing. "Why, if abandoned now, the box in this state could not be restored. See! the knife-blade is broken in! It *will* come out though! No, no! hopeless! Heavens! how the thing is scratched! mutilated! quite spoilt! Yet if—this key filed—I have a file in my dressing-case. Quick, quick! It'll fit now, —nearly! Well done! It goes in; but, a little pressure, and a little force—a little more—" At the breaking of the key (the key as might have been expected did break) she fell upon her knees; first she prayed, then she sobbed, then reflected, hoped, despaired, wept again; but lastly, snatched up the box and muttered, while she worked, with clenched teeth, "Force shall do it yet! The shovel—too soft—no matter, the poker will smash it. (crash). Good God! another like that will wake the household, and send them terrified to find me guilty. Ha! I have it—at last I have it—the fire! How it burns! Blazes! Crumbles! and the key, the red-hot key is mine!" I'll answer for it her heart was red-hot too!

What an aspect she wore when her triumph was complete! Of all others it was the one an artist would have chosen to stamp a lasting impress of her figure with. Her redundant hair veiled her exquisite form in such waving tresses, that looking on them only would ensnare a man's soul in such meshes as he would caress, though they bound him in eternal slavery. In her features, womanly fear and proud scorn struggled together. Maiden modesty blushed at maiden love. The smile of triumph mocked the tear of hopelessness, and as one passion chased another with the electric speed of fancy's course, so did her mobile features respond to the ruling presence of each in turn.

And now for the encounter. Pass we the minor interests of jarring bolts and ghostly shadows, of intricate passages, of chilling drafts, of watch-dog's bay; and come we to the dungeon (coal-hole) door. She tapped so gently the rats within could not have heard her.

"Fabian," she whispered; no answer. "Mr. Harrod!" (louder).

"Who is it?" replied a voice from a bed of

coals. "Pray come in." The lock flew back—the door stood open.

"Fly!" said the other voice. "For God's sake lose not an instant! Go!"

"Meriel!" exclaimed the young man, in amazement. "Dearest Meriel, can this be you?"

"Oh! go! go!" she said, "if you ever—for my sake, I intreat you do not waste a moment. Go!"

"Meriel," said he, "I will obey you this minute; but I cannot, will not lose this opportunity which I am here to seek, without one word of explanation. Do not be so terrified; none but ourselves are astir at this time of night. Dearest Meriel you must listen to me!" (he took her hand).

"I cannot, I must not, indeed, Mr. Harrod; is this a just return for the risk I am running. Let me go. I command you to release me, sir."

"Meriel, I never thought to hear your voice addressed to me in those tones, nor feared till now that I should ever deserve your anger;" he released her hand. "I sought this interview to explain what deceit

has been used to poison your heart against me, and to declare to you, at the same time, how desperately, or, rather—for this is no word for so long a love as mine—rather how deeply and fondly I am attached to you. I find, however, the last few years of my life have been spent in an idle delusion; and both for the trouble I have now given you, and the presumption of my hopes, I most heartily beg your forgiveness; if I may not be your lover, I can never forget that we have all our lives been friends."

"Fabian," Meriel's voice was choked, "do not mistake my meaning. Leave me," (she held out her hand, as he took it, he suddenly observed she was crying.)

"Meriel! my own Meriel!" he exclaimed, "you love me. I see you love me. Yes, yes! your tears confess. Two words from you, and I am gone. May there be patience, hope?"

"Yes, yes!" she passionately breathed, and snatching her lips from his, darted back into the house. Fabian watched her light form till the door closed upon it; and his ears heard the lock go which secured his love within.

CHAPTER XII.

When the fowler has tangled his feathered quarry within the meshes of his murderous net, and exults in immediate prospect of wringing a thin and downy neck, it is a satisfaction, albeit small, to retain within his grasp a tail or handful of plumage, even should the bird slip through his fingers; so, too, the trapper's regret is mingled with pleasure, when he finds the iron fangs have torn a limb from off the vermin which, by this loss, has saved its skin. No less does the sportsman cry out to mark the wound he inflicts on the flying game which his skill missed but by a trifle to destroy.

How plainly, in these indications of his spleen at being baulked, does man evince the noble faculties which propel him onward to success! But this by the way. What I meant to draw from the above illustrations was, that had their prisoner left (not his tail, for despite Lord Monboddo's theory, which so exasperated Dr.

Johnson, assuredly Fabian had none to leave), had he left, I say, any trace whereby to discover the method of his flight, the general consternation which all were thrown into by the escape, might have been somewhat alleviated.

As to Meriel, she felt really unwell by breakfast time next morning, but dared not keep her room lest that should awaken suspicions, which the guilty ever live the victims of. When she came down, every one greeted her with the fact that was filling all but herself with wonder. "Somebody must have done it," was the wise and universal cry. "Who could it be?" was the universal question. Granstein made the only supposition which seemed to carry probability with it.

"Depend upon it," said he, "the fellow was after some girl, and she has let him out."

"Ay, ay," said Porteus; "nine times out of ten, as my long experience on the bench goes to prove, rogues and thieves always have their sweethearts. My word for't, there's no such desperate scoundrel as your lover-scoundrel. As to the girls, if a young fellow gets on the blind side of 'em, there's nothing a girl wont help him to carry off."

"You seem to think our sex very weak, Mr. Porteus," said Belinda.

"As to that, ma'am," says the parson, "there's never a son of Adam who has a higher opinion of a woman's determination than I, especially when she wants her own way."

"The curious part of it is," said Lord Mountseer, "whoever let him out, has not only kept my box, but has kept the key of the coal-hole."

"Then," says Porteus, slapping his thigh, "we ought to catch him. For surely either the key or the box may be found."

At this mention of the key Meriel was seized with the greatest alarm. She felt almost certain she had left the key in the door. If by accident she had brought it back to her room, and the housemaids should find it there while she was at breakfast, she would certainly be undone.

"We will cause every room in the house to be searched forthwith," cried Lord Mountseer, giving proper orders to the groom of the chambers, who waited at the breakfast-table.

"It would be a vast comfort," exclaimed Porteus, "if this search leads to the detection

of the person who aided the escape, for not only would it lead to retaking the prisoner, but we should be able to make a severe example of the rescuer. 'If any person,' says Burn, 'by any means whatever, aid or assist any prisoner to escape, or in attempting to escape, from any prison, every person so offending, whether an escape be actually made or not, shall be transported beyond the seas for any term not exceeding fourteen years.'"

"Ah," said Raven, "that will be a pleasant honey-moon trip, if sweetheart and lover go together."

Meriel bit her lips. Raven would sometimes say a thing like this. Now it was when the party had risen from the breakfast-table, and were still conversing on the same subject, that an accident happened which gave a very remarkable turn to the great variety of conjectures which each one's ingenuity had vied with the others' in putting forth. The invention of Dr. Beschafenheit began to be most fertile at the time those of other people repeated themselves from exhaustion.

"With the respect to your hypothesis," cried he, "of the housebreaker and lover hav-

ing a federal-anorgic-peripheral motivity in one expression, nothing is more probable. For although in the desiderative the appetite is governed by the Rational, and the Rational by the Intellectual—"

"Ah," interrupted Lord Mountseer, "these are Plato's very words."

"Nichts desto venigher—the reverse is also true; viz., that the Intellectual is subject to the Rational, the Rational to the Appetite, and the Appetite is governed by the Desiderative. Now, respecting this creatively-preparatory influence, nothing is more certain as the lover was let out of the gaol by his sweetbread."

"Sweetheart! sweetheart! doctor," cries Lapwing.

"As you please, Mr. Lapving," said the doctor. "Therefore"—here the professor casually pulled his handkerchief from his coat-pocket—"Therefore, eh? What der teufle is dat?" said he, staring, as did the eyes of the whole company at a large key which fell from the folds of his handkerchief on the floor.

"The key!" exclaimed Lord Mountseer, holding it up to the admiration of all.

"The key!" exclaimed a dozen voices at once. "And in Dr. Beschafenheit's pocket!"

"Well, this is the most unaccountable business I ever witnessed," said one.

"Transportation beyond the seas for a term not exceeding fourteen years," cried Porteus.

"This explanation *of*, turns out to be an apology *for*, love," said Lord Granstein.

"Yes," said Mr. Lapwing; "but in that matter the doctor's theories seem more Platonic than his practices."

"Pardon me, ladies and gentlemen," cried the professor, holding up his hands to procure a hearing; "there is but one way in which I shall explain. I bledge my honours I had no more idea of the key being in my pocket as you. In my life, many times I have walk in my sleep; yet I regret very much my accident should be to let a d— farlet like that one to escape. The matter is *merkwidig* to a philosopher, however. Aristoteles pelieved that sleep was a recession of inward heat *mit* a natural kind of circumobsistence. But dreams is fantastics upon the sensory. When *zum beispiel*, the blood, is smooth like a lake, the image he reflect is smooth too. When *aber*

there be commotions, such as come from alimentary humors in sleeping after dinner, then, like the stormy water, the image is *viel* distorted. But to my particular case. You all know, ladies and gentlemen, that the potato you eat to-day make a little piece of your eye to-morrow, for thus goes on the *aufzug* of regeneration. Well, just as the pudding of yesterday make the nose of to-day, so, in spirituals, the former idea makes the present mind, which is so much as to say, what I think to-morrow shall be what I have thought to-day."

"Come, come, doctor," says Mr. Lapwing, "that proposition is not tenable; to judge by the past what you think to-morrow, will be the exact reverse of what you think to-day."

"Well, well, Lapvings; your head is full of the fly machine. But I tell you a tream is gombosed of the motions of the external senses, and if all the evening I hear of a varlet lock up in the coal-hole, when I sleep this make my dream. Also, if through me the peast have escape, this is how it must be happened."

Nothing could give greater satisfaction than this happy explanation. Almost every one present was thoroughly bewildered with

the professor's farrago. But none doubted, since the key was found in his pocket, that the sleepwalker had liberated the suspected housebreaker. Meriel alone, who before thought herself the only one in possession of the secret, now remained more perplexed than any of them. "Somebody," thought she, "must have played this trick for a purpose." With this perplexing suspicion in her head, her eye met Raven's; his glistened with an expression of meaning which she soon guessed at; as he moved away she followed.

"Was this your doing?" she inquired.

"What a question!" he exclaimed, smiling and feigning surprise.

"Why did you do it?" she went on.

"Because," lowering his voice, "foreseeing the trouble your boldness might have brought you into, I made this use of the key to lay the hounds on the wrong scent."

"Then you knew —"

"Everything. I waited a later hour to release the housebreaker! I found the gaol-bird flown; I guessed something, and your looks this morning confirmed the rest."

"But others cannot surely have—"

"Suspected you? No; you are safe, though the game was somewhat perilous. May you never be less fortunate." These last words Raven spoke with a tone of sadness, and the look he gave her was full of melancholy affection.

She took his hand, pressed it warmly, and whispered "You are always true."

"Humph!" he replied, and walked away.

It would be very reasonable to suppose that, the assurance Meriel now possessed of Fabian's devotion and fidelity, should be a great relief and source of secret pleasure, to her mind; especially as the hints which he had thrown out gave her room to believe, that what she had before blamed him for doing, might now be attributed to the agency of others: yet the very suspicion that such agency had been employed awakened in her thoughts fresh alarms, and opened her eyes more than ever to the obstacles which fate seemed resolved to oppose to her happiness. Another misfortune attached to the discoveries his declaration had made to her was, that they all placed him in the most favourable light, which, in other words, is as much as to say, they served to heighten both

her love and desire in equal degrees. How would it end? was the ever-perplexing question; either she was to be his, or she was not. The first solution comprised a breach of duty, involving her father's distress; the second, which was perfectly intolerable, the loss of Fabian, and a broken heart. When Fabian had had the last word, he carried everything with him; when her father's image arose, this in turn obtained the supremacy.

"Alas!" thought she, "this is the penalty I justly pay for my sinfulness; could I now dismiss the suspense about the future, and place the issue in the hands of Him who rules everything for the best, how much misery I might be spared! But such is my lamentable weakness, brought on by yielding to my passion, that though I see both the folly and wickedness of my ways, I am powerless to turn my heart in the right direction."

The idea of feebleness inclined her thoughts to seek strength from its Eternal Fountain instead of in self, where it is never to be found, and in this way, as often happened, she obtained, poor girl, the only consolation that visited her. Glad should I be could I record

the endurance of these soothing moments; but unfortunately, the worst of her trials were yet to come. Meriel had now been just a fortnight with the Mountseers; every day Lord Granstein had manifested stronger symptoms of his growing passion. The time had arrived when he could no longer endure the doubts which all lovers are victims to, in a measure, but which are naturally most unbearable to those who have reason to believe themselves uncared for. Of this last class the young viscount was one, and to cast the die, as the expression runs, he now resolved. We forbear to afflict the reader with unnecessary pangs, by detailing to him the particulars of the unhappy youth's rebuff; partly, because we are of opinion that false positions are seldom more agreeable, (unless with vicious minds,) to witness, than to be placed in; and partly because Meriel behaved so beautifully on the occasion, that we prefer leaving the matter with the reader's imagination, to marring the delicacy of her tact by the rough handling of description. Painful as this circumstance was to her, (it happened when she was least able to bear it—on the very day of her adventure with the supposed house-

breaker) it led to consequences infinitely more harassing. A few hours after the proposal, Mr. Harrod arrived at the Castle. In the same unaccountable way in which similar affairs always spread, the report of Lord Granstein's refusal, had already become known to every one in the house. Harrod learnt it from the lips of the countess. Lady Mountseer was in tears; after relating the fact—

"It is a great comfort," said she, "to think that all is for the best, and though my poor heart bleeds, I am sure, to see my poor darling boy afflicted, yet, when one reflects that these things are ordained by a merciful Providence, and that whatever happens to us is much too good for such miserable sinners as we all are, I am sure I do my best to be cheerful about it."

Lady Mountseer stifled her sobs and continued—

"It was always against my wish, (though I feel it is very sinful to have conceived a wish, which has proved contrary to the beautiful disposition of Providence,) that my darling boy should seek a partner for life in one over whom such a dreadful denunciation hangs, and

who I cannot but feel, every time I look at her, poor creature, is doomed to be the victim of an awful malediction. I am sure it is very sinful in me to feel this, for when I reflect that all things work together for good, it should be a source of perpetual comfort; indeed, when we remember how every one of us is subject to eternal condemnation, as the just reward of our first parents' fall, and how many who have not had our advantage must suffer in everlasting torments, I am sure one has every reason to be most thankful, and indeed I hope I am so; at least, I do my best to be cheerful, I am sure."

Mr. Harrod offered some consolation, and, leaving her ladyship to digest her grief, according to some prescriptions of her favourite author, the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Pilgrim, he immediately sought an interview with old Mr. Sigismond. They were soon engaged in the closest conference.

"It is," observed Mr. Harrod, "a most unfortunate affair, and heartily rejoiced should I have been, had my suspicions been communicated early enough to have prevented what, for every reason, is much to be regretted."

"God knows," cried Mr. Sigismond, "no

event in my life ever gave me the happiness this marriage would have given, could she have been induced to listen to his proposal; she liked him, always liked him, and for my sake she would have accepted him, had it not been for the most unfortunate attachment she has already formed."

"I feared how it would be, I knew my boy's gadding disposition so well; but you know, sir, you would not listen to my warning."

"Your warning, sir, where was the good of your warning, when the mischief was done? Hadn't he—this, by your own acknowledgment, worthless young man—had he not, I say, already tampered with my child's affections? Warning! ay, blight the only flower the relentless hand of fate has spared to cull, convert my cherished garden of hope into a wilderness of desolation, then forsooth, talk to me of warning. Sir, I would you kept your condolence to yourself; that you have indirectly been the cause of my distemper, grants you none the more a diploma as my mind's physician. You cannot help me, Mr. Harrod, but by your absence."

"Dear sir, your disappointment warps your

better judgment, and makes you treat those as foes who would be friends. I own, suspicion will grow where injury has been sown; but this is, after all, a bastard crop. True nobility of soul, true nobility I say,—but why should I attempt to define that which the inspiration of your own mind must make you most familiar with."

"Sir, were I as unsuspicious as innocence and ignorance combined, flattery would teach me to question my own honesty first, then his who bade me look for what I could not find. If you must speak, let it be to the purpose, and I pray imagine I am neither blind to my own faults, nor to those of other people!"

"Alas! that none of us are perfect is our misfortune, but—"

"More often much our fault, sir."

"Well, I wish as earnestly as you can, that something might be done to remedy this ill-favoured accident."

"I tell you, Mr. Harrod, nothing can be done; time only can work the cure."

"Ah, sir, your experience must have taught you, that they who place reliance anywhere but in themselves, for the most part, add disappointment to previous trouble. I venture to assert, in this particular case, decision and

firmness exercised now, *now*, mark me, will prevent a world of sorrow in time to come. This is an affair of love, and we all know love to be a malady as incident to one period of life as measles to the age which precedes it, and toothache, baldness, gout, rheumatics, blindness and the like, to that which follows. Now, there is, I admit, no certain cure for any of these complaints, but if any one of them be scared off for a while, the chances are it is superseded by a worse, and so on till annihilation commutes them all; but woe to them who increase their burden at every stage, being sufferers, as sometimes we see old men, of hooping-cough and general decay at once! A bold stroke will stun this lively passion; stifle it when down, starve it out by action, absence, divertisement; when likely to recover, meet all its rebellious movements with resolute government, and may I henceforth miss my every aim, if such treatment force not the disease to consume itself."

"Or break out in more fatal manner! No, no, it is trite to say it, but opposition only heightens love. I will not be cruel, until I can save a greater, by causing a lesser, pain."

"Ay, but though the fire is choked only

to burst out fiercer, with a little water, use enough, you'll safely put it out. There is restraint which can be evaded, there is also oppression, which crushes all resistance."

"And you would council me to use this to my child? Fie upon you, sir; you forget that, barring all other ties, for eighteen years, the tenderness you count on has twined itself round every fibre of my heart. God is my witness, I would not stir authority but to serve her where she fail to serve herself."

"And how would you acquit your conscience, if from too much fondness you set aside that said authority, which Providence has vested in you? Our hearts are full of subtle subterfuges to spare the elasticity of fragile inclination with ironsided obligation. Perchance you overlook this danger."

"You are right, Mr. Harrod (impatiently), you are right, I do wrong to shrink from using the knife where it is to sever my child from such a tie! Perhaps, too, your shrewdness may have devised some means for weaning her affections. Have you threatened your son with the terrors you propose I should use to shake my child?"

"Depend on it Mr. Sigismond I have neither neglected, nor will abate, my best endeavours to save him the dishonour of breaking his engagement withMiss Derisley. But what can you do with a wilful man? I promised him disinheritance if he acted basely. His answers were full of duty and submissiveness; such as 'You may rely on me for always consulting your wishes.' 'Be not the least alarmed lest I should sacrifice the interest of a life to the whim of a moment.' 'Of course, in the end, I mean to keep my engagement.' These, and fifty such answers, dropped as readily from his lips as though the whole blossom of his thoughts overflowed with the honey of filial fondness. But, and you, too, must have seen that ere now, as wisely expect to judge the soundness of eggs by their shell, as test the sincerity of hearts by motions of the lips. Oh! sir, there is much dishonesty in the world."

"Sir, I most implicitly believe you; but how then do you purpose to remedy this, as you term it, ill-favoured accident?"

"I say, whatever I could do has been done. It remains for you to remonstrate—gently, (if that will serve, as heaven grant it may,) with your daughter."

"Useless! 'tis quite useless! I know her character, full of tenderness and most entire obedience, but firm to obstinacy while fancying she defends a righteous cause; she is enthusiastic, too, and the more dazzling an illusion, the more passionately she embraceth it. Above all, she hath a spirit that would survive the most protracted torture; and as one law reigns in her nature, to one only power would she submit—"

"And that is—"

"Kindness."

"Have you spoken with her?"

"I have."

"What said she?"

"Promised obedience, for better reasons than your son perhaps could give."

"May I ask them?"

"She found him, your son I mean, sir, unworthy of her esteem."

"Alas! I begin to fear he is; still, she has refused Lord Granstein, for no other reason but that she prefers Fabian. Now, mark me, Mr. Sigismond, I again repeat to you, I cannot be answerable for my son's conduct, unless you seize this opportunity of putting a stop to the whole thing, you take

upon yourself the most serious responsibility; I wish you good morning."

"Stay a minute; I have permitted you to raise a hideous phantom, do you or do you not see a way to dispel it?"

"I told you what might be done by promptness and decision, if you are prepared to exert them."

"How exert them?"

"Insist on Miss Sigismond accepting Lord Granstein within a certain time."

"Never."

"Well, sir, good morning."

"Stay; is this your only scheme?"

"You will not hear me out, Mr. Sigismond; you might not insist on her taking him, if she persisted in her objections; but this much you would gain—her positive and final renouncement of Fabian, in exchange for your abandonment of the match with Granstein."

"But she has already renounced your son, therefore my gain is nothing."

"Mr. Sigismond, she may have renounced him, but believe me she will not cease to love him, that is, if ever she did love him, (of course, you know more of this than I do,) until he

renounces her, especially if she be the character you have just described."

"And how is one who recognises neither honor, duty, nor any other moral principle, to be induced to forsake his devilish purposes?"

"Not easily; yet not impossibly. As thus: use the threats I have suggested to you; withdraw them on this condition, that she at once write to Fabian a letter, which I will dictate, or rather, of which I will now furnish you with a draft. If she has no feeling about him so much the better; if, on the other hand, she has, as you say she has, already renounced him, it will cost her little to confirm her resolution. At the expense therefore of a simple device, which creates a little alarm in the first instance, you adopt the only measure I can think of to secure her from future misery. How like you the notion?"

"As little as I like any deceit, be the object what it may; but I will work by your design, and should it please heaven to overlook its practice, in consideration of my just intent, let her but reap the benefit, may I suffer the entire penalty!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The reader will have no difficulty in figuring to himself the extremely painful scene which the adoption of Mr. Harrod's scheme occasioned between the unhappy Meriel and her parent. Mr. Harrod gained his point, Mr. Sigismond succeeded with his threat, and a letter was written, which Meriel solemnly promised her father, should be dispatched either that night, or the first thing in the morning. But these matters we shall revert to presently: it is the fortune of Fabian we are now called on to pursue.

Young Harrod found his pony where he had tied it, and to judge by the conduct of this little beast, by his voice also, (for he set up a most hilarious whinny at his master's approach,) he rejoiced as heartily at their meeting as did Fabian. If, with every improbability of success staring him in the face, master Fabian was light-hearted on his way to Gran-

stein, you may be sure, on his road from it, with Meriel's "Yes! yes," ringing in his ears, his lips still honeyed with the touch of hers, her adored figure still glowing before his eyes, and only the necessity of patience intervening between him and the possession of his idol, you may be sure, I repeat, that master Fabian was not less merry now than when he traversed the same ground three or four hours before. In truth, he had never felt in such overflowing spirits in the course of his whole life, and though perfectly contented with his present cause for enjoyment, he could not keep from his mind (to be sure he made no effort to do so) a crowd of visions which, notwithstanding they made his mouth water, are much too ridiculous and romantic to set forth in print.

The pony having his ideas also teeming with some very lovely fancies about chopped hay, galloped on so gayly that both rider and beast found themselves close to Nordefall before either had taken heed of the distance they had come. Here, by common consent, the gallop slackened, or rather abruptly changed into a walk, and, to do the rider justice, had he been a bit less at home in

his saddle, the wonderful suddenness of the little animal's stop must infallibly have pitched the master over its head. Fabian had scarcely had time to make the reflection when he thought he could distinguish a voice, as if of one calling out in danger. He pulled up to listen; instantly his doubts were dispelled, for with perfect distinctness the cry of "murder," several times repeated, fell upon his ears. The night was not quite dark, for though now at its mid hour, some light from the moon penetrated the stormy clouds. Still, however, he could make out nothing in the direction whence the voice proceeded; but hearing it continue to cry, he jumped off the pony, and forced his way through the road-side fence to the point whither the sound guided him. As he advanced, the absence of utter obscurity was a great advantage, for he now perceived a dark mass in the middle of the field wherein he stood. A few more steps revealed to him two men, apparently maltreating, with terrible violence, a third, who lay on the ground; the two on their legs were armed with heavy sticks, one was belabouring the unfortunate wretch, who cried for mercy, while the other

cheered on his mate with exclamations such as "Gi' it to un." "Let in to un." "—— his eyes, I'd teach the old —— to keep a civil tongue in his head, I 'ould." Without hesitating a moment to consider the odds, Fabian dashed in, and aimed a heavy blow at him who was cudgelling the fallen man, while at the same time he thrust aside the bystander. Such a surprise instantly drew the attention of both men to the intruder, and with one accord they simultaneously fell upon him, threatening him with even a severer mauling than they had just bestowed on their first victim.

A smart set-to of single-stick practice now ensued, and a precious rattling the staves made as they clashed and banged one against the other; so dexterous and so nimble was Fabian, that by springing here, and turning there, he managed to keep a front to both his enemies, his great weight and length of arm giving him a much longer reach than either of his opponents: being also an excellent swordsman, no less in the use of the rapier than the broadsword, he knew well how to guard himself against blows. The fierceness of the onset he had to contend against, however, left him

no opportunity to change, for an instant, his defence into an attack, until at last his quick eye observed an unwary movement on the part of one of his adversaries. Fabian managed to catch a momentary hold of this fellow's stick; and though he necessarily endangered his own person by removing his guard, he could not resist the temptation, but with all his force levelled his black thorn at the other's crown. Had a shot gone through the heart of him who received this tremendous blow, he could not have fallen more dead to the ground. But as fate would have it, poor Fabian never knew the result; for, in that identical minute, he sustained just such another stroke upon his own skull, which stretched him at full length, and with as little sense left in his body as remained in that of his prostrate foe.

No sooner did the surviving ruffian perceive that he was master of the field than he began to examine, one after another, the bodies which lay around him. "Isaac," said he, turning over his comrade, "I say, Isaac!" you ben't killed, be you?" The question, which either "yes" or "no" would have answered equally well, obtained no reply; but on placing his hand to the

other's heart, "The ticker aint run down whatsumever," said he; "though —— me if I 'ouldn't as 'lief you got that there crack as me." Then turning Fabian's body about, "How" he exclaimed, "is it here? A case I'se afeerd. Yes! The doctors be cheated this bout, though the coffin-makers 'll take it out in nails, for blow me if he ben't a long un. Well, old boy!" he now came to the third man, who, to all appearances, was as dead as any of them. "Why! the old cock has slipped his wind for all his crowing. Dead as fo'pence, and not worth half the money! I tell 'e what, Jack!" here the soliloquiser addressed himself, "if this job don't smell of hemp, I never see one as did. No!" he continued, after partly raising Isaac in his arms, "I guess I'd better let you tell the tale for yourself. If three dead men be found of a field, and stiffer they be, and better they speaks for theirselves; but if one live un be nabbed, this here has to answer for the lot. So —— me if I sees the wantage of stopping here no longer."

Scarcely had this conclusion been carried into effect when one of the bodies (the last examined) cautiously raised itself; and after

watching him who had just spoken till he was out of sight, jumped up and scampered off in a contrary direction, as fast as his legs would bear him.

To explain with the utmost brevity the meaning of the above scene, the two ruffians, I must tell you, were the brothers Sandford, he who ran away was our old friend the mole-catcher. The assault sustained by Mr. Davy, came to pass in this wise. Jack Sandford, who hitherto has been only casually alluded to, dwelt, or more properly speaking, lay perdue, in the vaults of the ruined Priory. He it was, as the reader must have long since guessed, who so dreadfully frightened poor Meriel, when she heroically descended into the cave to save Jack's infant niece; and in these caves or cellars the escaped convict found shelter and concealment, until the expiration of the short period yet remaining to complete the term of his exile should allow him again to appear at large. In consequence of the necessity Jack was under of keeping in his hiding-place all day, he generally spent the night above ground, sometimes holding stolen interviews with his mother, or Isaac (Mark

and his wife had never been entrusted with the secret of his return), and sometimes making excursions over the neighbouring properties, in the profitable and amusing pursuit of snaring hares, netting partridges, and the like. He was on an expedition of this latter kind, accompanied by his brother Isaac, when Davy, who had been paying a very late visit to Raven's housekeeper, chanced to stumble across them on his way home. The reader will easily recollect that Davy and the footman were at daggers-drawing; now Isaac, who had a very excellent memory for old scores, and likewise a natural aversion to leaving debts of this kind unpaid, at once perceived this to be an excellent opportunity of settling his accounts with the mole-catcher. Davy was not behindhand in guessing at the other's straightforward intentions, but being in no immediate want of a thrashing, he would gladly have given his debtor longer credit, and would, moreover, have been prepared to add something, at their very next meeting, to the former obligation. Such an idea did not coincide with Isaac's views; so, before Davy had time to pass on, the footman seized him by

the throat and was in the act of belaboring him, when Fabian heard the cries of "murder."

Our lover's timely reinforcement saved honest Davy many a sore bruise, and possibly, had this one done as much in backing up his rescuer as the young gentleman did for him, the issue of the conflict might have been very different; but no point in Davy's character was more conspicuous than his discretion, and none, we might add, so indiscernible as his valour: he therefore conceived that, on the same principle by which a soft answer turns away wrath, no answer at all might save him from a blow; in short, he thought the safest plan was to die outright, and the sequel spoke volumes for his prudence. Directly Jack slunk off, Davy, who had heard the conquering hero's soliloquy, started away to raise the hue-and-cry in the village. What state the two disabled men were in he paused not to examine; for he reasoned, and most logically too—"If Master Fabian is killed, I can do him no good by staying; if he lives, the quicker I get him carried home the better. With regard to Isaac, should he recover, it will only be to break my head; but, if I can have

him seized, the sooner it's done the quieter he'll be."

The village clock had struck two in the morning by the time Davy had roused the inmates at the "Mitre." Mine host soon slipped on his drab small-clothes, and joined Davy in the tap-room. The landlady and the buxom barmaid, all night-capped as they were, listened tremblingly (at first) behind the door; the ostler shortly made another of the party, and an Irish reaper, who had slept in the straw, now dropped in to complete the audience. No novel-writer, nor the greatest liar in the world, could pride himself more on his powers of story-telling than did the mole-catcher; and it is well known to those who are in the habit of substituting metaphors for facts, what a fillip a good *i. e.* a gullible, audience will give to the fancy. At Davy's description of Fabian's death, the barmaid, into whose hand the generous youth had slipped many a shilling, and upon whose rosy lips he had imprinted many a kiss, fainted straight away into the willing arms of the ostler.

"Then," said the host, half afraid to speak it, "they must ha' beat his brain out!"

"Don't I tell 'e so?" returned Davy; "just go to the place, and see if it aint up to your ankles in brains."

"Whatever shall us do?" sobbed the landlady.

"Chare up, my darlen," whispered the ostler, to his plump and tender burden.

"Well," said Davy, after a great deal of talk, "hadn't us better be making ready for a start?"

Master Hodges thought they ought to wait for daylight. The ostler was of the same opinion; but the barmaid and the Irishman took the opposite view. This difference led to a spirited discussion. Davy however, fearing lest his exaggeration should be attended with more serious consequences than he had intended, now began to exert his best eloquence to bring them all to one mind. The landlady declared she would have no more murders committed that night; and but for some threats, which Davy held out to Master Hodges, intimating that, as a constable, he would be amenable for the murderer's escape, poor Fabian might have lain where he was until the crows had picked his eyes out.

The possibility of falling into bad odour with the magistrates operated potently on the landlady; consoling herself, therefore, with a cordial, she administered the same to each one of the party, all of whom, when fortified in this way, took the field, and swore heartily that come what might, they would stand by each other to the last.

Davy, with the Irish reaper, led the advance, the landlord and the ostler walked behind; not a word was spoken above a whisper; for to say truth, every one, not excepting Davy, expected an enemy to spring from the first bush by the road side. They were progressing in this order when of a sudden an exclamation burst from the lips of the Irishman; as he made it he started back with a spring, and lighting on some of the ostler's tenderest toes, caused that hero to drop his lanthorn, whose light was instantly extinguished by the fall. A dead silence followed this painful catastrophe, which was presently broken by low whispers of "what is it?"

"The divil!" says Patrick.

"Where?" echoed in hollow tones all at once.

"Tin yards ahead of yez," says Pat. "But the Lord forgive me av I know where he may be now."

"Oh, dear! oh, my dear master! do you think it be a sperit?"

"Mercy on us!" cried Master Hodges, "I think it be possessed of my inside already! Lork, I do feel so queer!"

"Stand well together," says Davy.

"Hark!" exclaimed the Irishman, "didn't ye hear them cheens ratlen now; ochone! 'tis a banshee, I'm sure of ut."

"What's that?" says Davy.

"Oh! the divil saize me! I can't stop to tell yez now; I never see but wan of them, and sorra a bit will I forget her, till the longest day of me loif; but I say, darlens, wheel on a bit; there's something moighty unpleasant about this place."

The little body were now huddled together into a lump, each having his arm linked within his neighbour's, though they could not be said to walk abreast, nor was any more advanced than another.

"There it is agin!" cried the Irishman, "don't ye see him?"

None could reply by reason of their chattering teeth, for the object of terror, whatever it was, now appeared a few paces ahead of them, and before they could retreat a single step, a similar object discovered by its motion its proximity on their other side. The position was awkward in the extreme. They were in a narrow lane, and the moon having by this time gone down, one false move might, as all comprehended, change their predicament for a worse. The second object, unlooked for till now, made them spring as well as they could out of its reach; this carried them right into that of the first. But no sooner did it so happen than the sound of a violent blow, followed by a dying groan from the poor ostler, greeted the terrified senses of the other three; on turning to support his fall, a similar and equally heavy blow, that took the landlord on that quarter which he had incautiously turned to the other enemy, laid him sprawling flat upon his face. After two such galling volleys, the prudent Davy and the ready-witted Irishman would certainly have taken to their heels, had they not, by a lucky accident, discovered in their late terrible foes no

other than a pair of innocent donkeys, which being tethered in the lane by their fore feet, had shown that front to their opponents which other warriors only present in the case of a retreat. At this disclosure Davy set up an immoderate chuckle, while the Irishman, turning towards the long-eared animals, bestowed upon them an inconceivable number of the most incongruous epithets. The wounded men, who had suffered more from fear than actual injury, were vastly comforted at sight of the jackasses; and although many heroes would have felt crest-fallen at the notion of succumbing to a donkey, these two began to remind the others of the boldness, nay rashness, with which they had advanced upon what all had supposed to be a more formidable foe; and omitted not to charge their comrades with dastardly cowardice, by account of which they, the sufferers, had run imminent risk of mortal damage.

Matters being thus satisfactorily arranged, *videlicet*, by one party bearing the bruises and the other the abuse, they finally reached the spot where Fabian lay senseless on the ground. Isaac was away; nor did this circumstance act like a disappointment on the heroic band;

for despite the deep regret one and all gave vent to, their manner betrayed twice the alacrity and cheerfulness from the moment the footman's departure was ascertained. The insensible body was borne upon the shoulders of the four men; and when Mrs. Hodges and the barmaid beheld the unfortunate youth, stretched at full length on the best bed in the "Mitre," the first declared she had never seen so fine "apportioned" a young man in her days; the latter, while she sobbed hysterically, that he had "the sweetest morals and the bootiful-lest head of hair it had ever fallen to her lot to be'old."

The village apothecary, who by the way was a Scotch gentleman, was now called in to examine the wound in Fabian's head; when he had done so, he shook his own; and although he said "it was possible the patient might survive," he added, "that it was beyond his power to declare with any degree of certainty for what precise length of time, life, in this instance, would be prolonged. Such a blow upon the skull as the patient had sustained, might, no doubt, be attended with various consequences; amongst these were concussion

of the brain, fracture, either compoond or semple, abrasion or contusion. Concussions, it was true, were rarely coincident with fractures, and were, for the main part, followed by instant deeth. Fractures were called semple when the bone was merely divided; compoond when broken, with a laceration of the integuments. In this instance, the blow, which might have been inflicted either by a blunt or by a sharp enstrument, it was impossible for him to say which, had fa'en directly upon the anterior portion of the mesial plane; it was therefore probable, should there be no fracture, that some derangement might have ta'en place in the articuleetion of the ethmoid and spheroid bones." When this learned man had concluded, the minds of his audience were filled with admiration for one who possessed such extraordinary knowledge. Dr. McSkinner well knew that his own advancement depended much more upon creating impressions of this kind, than upon his actual skill as a practitioner. Seeing, therefore, how favourable was the effect of his harangue, he determined not to meddle with a case which he did not the least understand; but desired that Mr. Harrod, senior, might be at

once informed of the accident, assuming so shrewd a gentleman would immediately procure such advice for his son, as would absolve him (Dr. McSkinner) from any responsibility. The mole-catcher volunteered to deliver the message, but some difficulty arose, owing to the uncertainty of Mr. Harrod's present location. Davy, to whom the movements of both gentle and simple were ever a matter of interest, had informed himself of Mr. Harrod's visit with Fabian to —shire. He had also understood that both were to return to Darsingham, at the expiration of a fortnight; and that one, the elder, intended to proceed to Granstein the day after he came home. Fabian's unexpected appearance somewhat disconcerted Davy's calculations. Whether Mr. Harrod was now at Granstein, in —shire, or at Darsingham, was more than he could decide upon. The last of these places was the first at which he sought him. Mr. Harrod, so he was there told, would in all probability go straight to Granstein, without taking Darsingham on his road. He might leave —shire that very day, but he would assuredly be at Lord Mountseer's on the day following.

More time might now have been lost in pursuing Mr. Harrod, than in seeking him at his next destination, at the earliest moment he might be expected to reach it; this Davy perceived to be the case. Having, therefore, abandoned the idea of seeing Fabian's father for another twenty-four hours, he did whatever lay in his power to assist meanwhile in nursing the wounded man, and set out for Granstein at sunrise on the following morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

Davy arrived at Granstein to find that Mr. Harrod had reached the Castle on the previous evening. This gentleman, however, was not yet awake; Davy had to wait. In the meanwhile he told his story to one of the footmen. When this person had heard it, what could be more natural than that he should tell it to his fellow footman; that this one again should repeat it to the porter, and that gradually it should reach the ears of the groom of the chambers, who carried it at once to his friend the butler. As it passed upwards with the male servants, so it passed from the mouth of the housekeeper to the humblest menial in the scullery, every one who told the tale adding to, or diminishing it, according to their several capacities, all agreeing in one respect only—the desire to make the very best story they could. Now in the entire establishment, neither man nor woman could be found, whose creative

faculties were to be compared with those of Meriel's maid. Mrs. Dolphin was a very Scherazade. Let her be started upon a much less fertile subject than that of an ox and an ass, her tongue would have kept the drowsiest man awake for twice a thousand and one nights at the fewest. Miss Sigismond was the last person in the world to gossip with her Abigail. But despite her dignity, which to be sure was often rather comically assumed in self-defence, she could not prevent Dolphin rattling off at score, nor could she at all times suppress the encouraging smile, which a sense of humour forced into her sweet face. When the maid called her mistress on the morning of Davy's arrival, she surpassed herself in the graphic effects of her delivery. Davy's account to the audience at the "Mitre" was meagre and jejune, compared with the picture painted by this experienced artist; and although we have not place for the simplest sketch of it, the reader will take our word when we assure him, that Meriel entered into the spirit of her maid's discourse, with no less sensibility than if her perceptive faculties had been strained to their utmost tension upon the rack, and all

her nerves had been laid bare to the flaying-knife of the torturer.

She soon sprang from her bed, and ere she had perfected her toilet, fifty schemes had crossed her for obtaining an immediate interview with the horror-bearing messenger. But not one of them, so ill-luck would have it, was destined to avail; at every turn hindrances beset her. Lord Granstein, whose feverish restlessness drove him to seek the first freshness of the morning air, had learnt the news, and was already putting a thousand questions to Davy, touching the adventure and condition of his friend. Him she took care to avoid, and kept aloof to watch her opportunity. Before it offered, others came to intercept it; these were Mr. Porteus, the whole bevy of young ladies, Lord Mountseer himself, and lastly Mr. Harrod, who conducted Davy aside, and kept him till the others had nearly finished breakfast; until he entered, Miss Sigismond had to listen to such versions of her lover's accident, that it required the painfullest efforts on her part to preserve her self-possession. Her face, even her lips, were pale with mental anguish; at last, when one

and all seemed to agree that, come what would, Fabian could not survive another day, her love for him threatened to betray itself maugre her resolution to control it. But no sooner had the poor fellow's fate been settled, than the conversation took a turn which terrified Meriel so much on another score, that in attending to its course, she for a moment forgot what had before distressed her.

"What" it was asked, "could have taken young Harrod out at two or three o'clock in the morning?"

"How singular, too, that the accident had happened on the same night Granstein Castle had been broken into!"

Luckily, Raven's wits were not so hard pressed as her own.

"Evidently," said he, with composure, "Fabian Harrod must have fallen in with the ruffian who attempted the burglary."

"Ay, ay!" said Porteus, "these fellows always go in gangs, and I'll be bound for it there's a precious lot of them somewhere in the neighbourhood."

When Mr. Harrod came in to get his breakfast before setting off for Nordefall, the rest of

the company dispersed. Miss Sigismond flew to her room, rang for Dolphin, and, regardless of suspicions, desired the maid to send Davy to speak with her in the shrubbery. With breathless eagerness she awaited the coming of the mole-catcher; when alone with him—

"Davy," said she, "how was . . . that is, when are you going back to Nordefall?"

"Not till I have seen Mr. Fabian's father again, miss, though I thinks he'll go over hisself pretty soon."

"I wanted to send something back by you, and I—I was afraid you might be gone before I could see you."

"Very pleased I'm sure miss, to please you."

"Thank you, Davy; and talking of Mr. Harrod (Davy saw her blush) how did you leave him?"

"Leave him, miss, why what can you expect, when they've beat his headpiece as soft as a coddled gooseberry?"

"Good God!" exclaimed Meriel; "but he will get better, good Davy?"

"Oh! better, yes; he's better already, no doubt of that, though I didn't think he ever would, before he was worse."

"Is he sensible yet, Davy?"

"Well, he's coming round, I thinks; he talked pretty rational this morning before I left him."

"What did he say?"

"Davy," said he—we'd been a talking about his breakfast, you know—"Davy," said he, or words to that effect, "bring us a pint of half-and-half. If there be a dry place in a man's throat, there's nothing like malt for finding of it out."

"What!" exclaimed Miss Sigismond; "is he so well as that? I fancied he'd been nearly killed."

"Indeed, was he; and so was I, an it come to that. There 'd like to have been two broken heads, and ne'er a sound one left to tell the tale."

"The attack was made upon you in the first instance, was it not, Davy?"

"And they'd have soon made worm's meat of me, but for Mr. Fabian stepping in."

"Then I suppose he came to help you, eh?"

"Yes, yes, he astonished the scoundrels you may depend."

"What! he fought gallantly, did he?"

"Ay, that he did; it was a sight worth

a cudgelling to look on at. I've seen here and there one that could use a fist, or twirl a quarter-staff, but burn me if Master Fabian couldn't thrash a regiment of 'em."

"So," said Meriel, and her eyes sparkled with generous friendship for the mole-catcher, "so he drove them all before him?"

"Like tow-pellets from a pop-gun! not, howsoever, till I got a hard knock or two on his account tho', mind you."

"Here's something to mend your bruises."

"Bless her heart! what a pair they'd make," soliloquised Davy, as he slipped a guinea into his pocket. "But he'll get better soon, no doubt of that, miss, no doubt of that."

"I hope so," returned Miss Sigismond, and sighed deeply, as though the thought gave more pain than pleasure; "you'll not leave till I have seen you again, Davy?"

"Certainly not, miss, if you wish it."

"In an hour's time then, I'll meet you in this same spot."

"The oftener the better," said Davy, who pulled the golden coin out to look at it, as Miss Sigismond turned herself towards the Castle.

The hour named had not elapsed before Davy was summoned to answer some further interrogations of Mr. Harrod's. The story of the housebreaker, which of course he had heard from beginning to end, roused many suspicions in his sceptical mind. "'Tis odd," thought he, "that one man alone should attempt to rob the Castle. His escape was evidently contrived, and the confederate avoids suspicion by placing the prison key in a fool's pocket." These vague reflections were the first that occurred to him; he had not talked for five minutes with Davy ere he was satisfied that his son and the housebreaker were the same person. To confirm the impression and clear up a few remaining doubts, he desired a second conference with the mole-catcher.

"The time, you say, was about an hour after midnight, and the assault took place in the field next the Granstein road?"

"That's right enough, sir," said Davy.

"So that Mr. Fabian must have come off the road that leads to Granstein, in order to assist you?"

"Must he, sir?"

"I ask you," said Mr. Harrod.

"Law!" said Davy; "how should I know? it didn't make no odds to me where he come from, did it Muster Harrod?"

"Stop a minute!" Davy was sneaking off.

"Yes," said Mr. Harrod to himself, "that'll settle the point. Tell me Davy what kind of a dress had Mr. Fabian on when you brought him in?"

"Well, sir, he had—let me see—he had an ordinary kind of dress, sir."

"What do you call an ordinary dress, pray?"

"Well, he had a shirt on, no doubt, and a pair of trousers, and—"

"Yes, yes, I know; but what sort of a coat? was it fustian, or cloth, or—"

"Lord bless your honour, do you think I was brought up a draper? besides, when a man's at his last gasp, we don't take much note of broadcloth, nor fustian neither."

"Stay a minute, there's one other question I wanted to ask. What was it? Oh, yes, Isaac Sandford, you say, was one of the men; you are sure of that?"

"Sure, sir? why didn't I feel un as well as see un?"

"But the other you could not recognise?"

"I thought I remembered his voice though."

"Could you swear to him if you met him?"

"A great chance if I could."

"That'll do, you may go."

"You'll not forget to summon Isaac, Muster Harrod."

"Never fear."

And away went Davy to meet Meriel in the shrubbery. For a whole hour Miss Sigismond had been making up her mind what course to pursue, touching the letter she had pledged herself to send. On the first announcement of Fabian's catastrophe, she concluded that there ceased any necessity for sending it. No letter from her, nor from any other being, would he ever read again. But Davy had dispelled her worst alarms. Young Harrod could not be so seriously injured after all; he would soon be well. No, there was no longer any pretext for breaking her promised word. It was an hour of inexpressible anguish to her. "For," she argued, "if he recovers, it will only be to be tortured by this letter, yet his death alone can save me from sending it." She decided at length, as she did on all similar occasions, to sacrifice every feeling to duty;

still, she hoped by means of Davy, to effect some compromise between her promise on the one hand, and her love and compassion on the other. She knew Davy had a sincere regard for Fabian; I say she knew this, for when a woman loves, whosoever or whatsoever is attached in any way or degree to the lord of her heart, is from the moment she has met with him, her, or it, an object of collateral interest. That Davy honoured Fabian she felt sure; she therefore resolved to put his friendship to good service. Her purpose was to place the letter in his hands, with strictest orders to withold it until the youth was past danger, not only from his present plight, but from the remotest likelihood of relapse. In this frame of temper, you may conceive how annoying any irrelevant interruption would infallibly be; yet, when just on the point of addressing Davy, who should come upon her but the German and Lapwing. At once they referred their argument to her.

"I say," observed Lapwing, raising his hat to the lady, "it never would have happened, if flying machines had been brought to practical perfection; when all travelling shall be through the air, highway robberies and

accidents of this description will be obviated for ever."

"What use you have," returned the professor, "to talk like that? Much worse accidents as this, shall you have; for if your dail (tail) gets oud of condition, how you shall steer the sheep? I tell you, Labvings, one balloon will charge against another, and so make the infernalste *schlagung* as no man never saw."

"Impossible," cried Lapwing, "my dear sir, impossible! grant that sails and rudders are unavailing, it follows, the vessel must take the course of a special current, and all other vessels coming in that current must pursue the same course."

"Peuteful! you mount your machine to take you to France, and very soon he puts you into the Atlantig; vind is an exhalation from the earth, also—"

"You are in a hurry, are you not, Davy?" inquired Miss Sigismond of the mole-catcher, at the same time withdrawing from the philosophers. "Here," said she, showing the letter, "is what I wished you to take back with you."

"For Master Fabian, miss?"

"Yes; and I have chosen you, Davy, to be

the bearer, since the person who wrote it was anxious it should be intrusted to an intelligent messenger, one who would have the sense and kindness to withhold it until Mr. Harrod sufficiently recovered to give his attention to—to matters of business."

"Miss Sigismond shall pe my judges," cried out Dr. Beschafenheit. "Labvings say, we shall have no more accidents, when his sheep (ship) is perfected. Now, I maintain in the all-embracing peripheral system of the self-subsisting cosmos, there brevail one complex interdependence; by which troughout the extension of the omnimanifold confederation, the seberative developement is reciprocally excited and put in motion. Also, what we call accident, is nothing more as the past action of this law, and must have happened, though no man could foresee it. I ax you, miss, if this is not so?"

"Not only am I of your opinion," replied Meriel, "but shall remain so, since I cannot stop to hear the other side of the question;" thus saying, she left the letter with Davy, and hastened off to avoid the everlasting wranglings of the philosophers.

CHAPTER XV.

"He began to recover his senses then," said Mr. Harrod to Dr. McSkinner, "soon after you bled him?"

"Almost immediately, sir."

"And last night he slept well?"

"Perfectly so, Mr. Harrod."

"Recovered his appetite at all?"

"It was no that bad this morning."

"You think him out of danger, of course?"

"Wal—yes, if there should be no relapse."

"And what course do you purpose to follow?" Mr. Harrod's eyes penetrated the little Scotch practitioner like steam drills through a deal-block.

"Wal—some would be for essaying diet, some again pheesick, and others both in combineetion. But—"

"You?" interrupted the unmerciful.

"I canna venture to say that this is preceesely a case for any one of them. And no

wise physeecian wull resort to medicine before he is parefetly acquented wi' the nature of a petient's compleent. For with respect to medicine (Mr. Harrod's silence encouraged the doctor) it would be wholly adverse to the practice of Galen, Hypocrates, M'Cracken and others to admeenister a purge where the petient was requiring an alterative, and should a stimulant—"

"I see," said Mr. Harrod. "Excuse me, I have some letters to write. I daresay you'll be in the way when Dr. Faucep comes."

Dr. Faucep, the eminent physician whom Mr. Harrod (as was surmised) had sent for the moment news of Fabian's predicament reached him, arrived in the evening. He consulted his less eminent brother with every mark of diffidence and esteem. It appeared that Dr. McSkinner had done nothing of consequence but bleed; whereupon Dr. Faucep assured the other, except in that one trifling respect, he could not have adopted a more admirable treatment. The great physician assuming the patient would, in his absence, fall into the hands of his less eminent brother,

proceeded to advise, *i. e.* give his orders, to McSkinner in a written form. While this was going on McSkinner made the most constant use of the interjections, "Ah! yes! preceesly so! just so!" signifying thereby that he cordially subscribed to the decision of the other; and, indeed, at last assured Dr. Faucep that this prescription was exactly what he had already determined upon. It need hardly be mentioned that McSkinner would have deemed it more than his own life was worth to venture upon any one of the remedies he now received orders to apply.

On the day after this consultation, we cannot assert *post hoc*, *propter hoc*, Fabian had so nearly recovered, that Davy conceived he might now, with propriety, deliver Miss Sigismond's letter. Independent of any previous suspicions, the mole-catcher never doubted that the packet he bore contained every term of endearment, and every vow of constancy which a young lady's fancy could invent, or her hand, by crossing and cramping, could squeeze into an ordinary sheet of letter paper. The warnings he had received strengthened this idea. "Be sure not to

deliver this exciting communication till a proper moment," implied to him, "Here's a guinea. Pass this into my sweetheart's hand the instant he is well enough to read it." Thus intent, Davy came early to the "Mitre." Here almost the first person he met was Mr. Harrod senior. Davy pretended not to have seen him, and this pretence brought the question to Mr. Harrod's lips,—"What the devil is this fellow up to now?"

"Good morning, Davy," said he, aloud, then asked, "was Mr. Fabian awake yet?"

Davy did not know, he had just stepped up to have a word with Master Hodges.

"Had he seen Mr. Fabian since he returned from Granstein?"

"He had not."

"Did Davy stay long at the Castle after Mr. Harrod left?"

"Not many minutes."

"Did he have any further conversation with any of the ladies?"

"Oh! yes, Mrs. Ginger, the housekeeper, asked after the old woman."

"What old woman?"

"Davy's mother."

"But up stairs?" Mr. Harrod named Miss Derisley and others.

Davy shook his head.

"And what did Miss Sigismond say?"

"She asked after the old woman, too."

"What else did she say?"

"Upon his honor he forgot, though, to be sure, his memory was like the old woman's basket when she used carry, as Mr. Harrod must remember, between Nordefall and Carrol. That there basket got so full of holes the more she carried, the more she dropped."

Mr. Harrod resolved to make a bold and random shot. "You have not yet," said he, "given Mr. Fabian that letter, I suppose?"

"This is Beelzebub himself!" thought Davy. "What letter?" stammered he.

"That which Miss Sigismond gave you, of course."

"Oh that! to be sure! I gave it to him last night, and he threw it into the fire directly he'd read it." Heaven forgive me for the lie, prayed Davy.

"I thought you had not seen him yet?"

"Sure Mr. Harrod must have misunderstood him."

As Mr. Harrod walked away, "Fabian," he muttered, "would never burn her letter; therefore, all that part of the story is a lie. Davy is here to deliver the letter now. I should like to know whether it is a copy of mine, or one of her own. First though, to make sure whether Davy brings a letter at all. If 'tis a message, I might overhear it. I'll watch." For this purpose he sauntered gently along the road to Darsingham.

"I must be quick," said Davy, when Mr. Harrod was out of sight. "The old ferret 'll be back again as soon as he thinks the lad's astir. Master Fabian! Master Fabian!" he whispered, popping his head into the young man's room, "are you awake, sir?"

"I soon shall be if you give me time," said the other, rousing himself from his sound repose.

"I've got a secret," whispered Davy.

"You look as if you'd discovered how to square the circle, and meant to keep it dark."

"It's no laughing matter whatever," said Davy. "You know, sir, I was at Granstein yesterday." Fabian changed countenance.

"That's a melancholy circumstance to be sure," said he.

"And I saw them as asked me many questions about you, sir."

"I hope you rewarded them handsomely, Davy."

"I didn't give nothing from you; but there was one as give me something for you."

"Who gave what?" said Fabian, colouring.

"This here's what, and the name's no doubt inside. Stop, sir, not so fast. Your father—"

"What of him?"

"Axed just now what I'd done with this letter?"

"Well?"

"I told him I give it to you last night, and swore you burnt it as soon as you read it."

"Then I hope you wont burn for having sworn it. Let's see the letter."

"In one minute, sir. He's certain to speak to you about it. And when he do, you'll mind and tell him—the devil!"

Fabian's eyes followed the direction of Davy's. Mr. Harrod stood quietly looking in upon the pair. He smiled, nodded, and left the window to enter the house.

"We're done for now!" said Davy. "I'll throw the letter into the fire before he comes."

"I'll throw any man into the fire that cracks so much as the seal of it," cried Fabian, snatching the note out of Davy's hands.

"Good morning father!" and Mr. Harrod entered the room.

"So," he said, "news from Granstein I presume. You (to Davy) may go." Mr. Harrod waited a few minutes, then crept to the door. The mole-catcher was listening of course. "Come, be off!" said he; when I require your council I'll take you into my confidence. Now, Fabian, don't you think it very foolish to persist in this ridiculous business? What can be the use of carrying on a clandestine correspondence with a girl you cannot marry."

"Really, sir," returned the son, "I must decline to discuss a question upon which we shall never agree. You have most unfortunately resolved to dictate a line of conduct to me which, with all my reverence for your authority as a father, I cannot bring myself to submit to. I am a man, neither wise nor experienced, perhaps; but unless I learn to

act for myself, the time may come when I shall lack the manly reliance which freedom alone can give. If, sir, my own strong feeling were all I could urge against my duty, that might be taught to yield. But I have such proofs that one, who is dearer to me than life, depends on my firmness, that your utmost rigour can henceforth only serve to call for more obstinate resistance to withstand it."

"Very well!" returned Mr. Harrod, "take your course, I will pursue mine. Only beware," he added, on leaving the room, "do not accuse me hereafter of acting less like a fond father than you have behaved like a dutiful son."

"Alas!" sighed Fabian, as the other departed, "I must not hope for different treatment than I have met with hitherto."

While Fabian reads his letter (we will return to read it with him presently) let us, if you please, accompany Mr. Harrod, and go back with him to Granstein.

He sought immediately for Mr. Sigismond: it might be tedious were the dialogue as each one spoke it given in full. The sum was this, Mr. Harrod informed Mr. Sigismond that he came

straight from the "Mitre," where he had seen Davy place a letter from Meriel in his son's hands. This, he added, he might have mistaken for the letter her father had dictated, were it not that Davy himself confessed to having delivered another letter on the night before. He had remonstrated with his son for carrying on a clandestine correspondence; whereupon his son had "pooh poohed," and spoke flippantly of a flirtation! Mr. Harrod ended by convincing Mr. Sigismond that unless he got his daughter married to Lord Granstein, or took her abroad, (though, to be sure, Fabian might follow her there) the worst might be expected.

When Mr. Sigismond was left alone he broke forth into complaint something in the style that follows. "What have I done that I should be persecuted with evil in this way? Surely malice and misfortune single me as the butt of all the calamities which they have withheld from others. This child, who might have been the vitality of my declining years, the eyesight of my old age, is destined to palsy me with care, converting the prop I leaned on into a goad to torture me. Alas! So is it ever. Expectation is a blos-

som, which disappointment, like a fruit, pushes from the stem. But is it for myself that I complain? Will the grave, already dug, not startle selfishness from our sides, or must it needs be buried with us? Heaven forbid such disinterested love as hers should be returned by one ungenerous thought. Who knows but the mysterious curse, which has already whispered its lasting vengeance in my ears, may attend this poor child, as it has hung over me? And but for her, who could have soothed a heart once so completely filled by my own; and only, son? Yes! she has been all in all to me. God grant I have omitted nothing of the duty or fondness of a father, and that in keeping from her a hateful secret, I have not, as Raven threatened, stored up a pang whose intensity must gain as revelation is postponed. No! no! this were too much punishment for a good intention. Besides, have I not done rightly? It is better—much better—she should be ignorant; Lady Fitzjohn and Raven alone possess the secret, and they both love her—love her too sincerely to tell her what now—nay, what always was better she should not know. Know? But if perchance she

should learn that I—I, for whose sake she thinks to have resigned her promises of happiness for life, have not this claim upon her! Oh, Providence! should this ever be, let not her reproachful sighs reach me where I may hear but cannot answer. Though rather this a thousand-fold than let me live to see her broken-hearted by my accursed fault. What must I do? The chilling touch of Time begins to strike a numbness into all my senses. Within a short space the light has left my eyes, thus to prepare me for a deeper darkness. Now, in the dissolution of my energies, a demand comes on me for more manhood than I ever did possess. Who shall protect thee, Meriel? The poor pittance I could save from these estates will not compensate thy loneliness; and should, at last, this libertine betray thee. Woe! woe! It is a bitter thought! Oh! if he were but honest! But no! his father is too right. Granstein, Lord Granstein is my only hope."

CHAPTER XVI.

The unhappiness which the parents had brought upon their children, promised soon to be pretty complete; and in observing this it should not be forgotten, how frequently parental care procures a similar result, professing, as it does in most cases, to have no object in view but the children's prosperity. It is too, remarkable, the more fathers, mothers, aunts, guardians, executors, &c., strive and scheme, plot and counterplot, meddle and make, to marry their children "*well*," the more certainly, ninety times out of a hundred, do they succeed in distressing these as much as they distress themselves. If I knew which side had right on it, I would for the sake of both denounce the folly of the other. But if any will give themselves the trouble to reflect, how Wisdom and Youth are as much at variance as Passion and Age ought to be, they will easily perceive that parents and children contemplate love from such different positions,

that neither can justly be said to be in the right, or the wrong. Some there are, who by the blessings of a natural insensibility, bitterly reprehend those young persons who desire no greater happiness than to rush into each other's arms. For my part, I am no better pleased to see cold calculation usurp the place of warmer impulses in youth, than I should be to witness Cupid with broken bow transformed from a plump curly-headed boy into a blear-eyed, shrunken-shanked old man. Be it not thought, however, that we would seem to inculcate disrespect for the superior discretion of our elders. There is no feature in our dear Meriel's character we more highly prize, than the devotional sacrifice of her heart of hearts upon the altar of filial love and duty. But not alone to the young do we address these volumes. To thee, fond guardian of thy sweet Virginia's peace and virtue, we say beware! Beware, lest in thy well-proved convictions respecting the good things of this world, thou forgettest the many instances thou hast seen, where honest men made better husbands than some who had no other dowry than rank and wealth. Beware! thou estimate marriage not

too much as a social, not too little as a sacred contract. Remember the husband, *i. e.*, the stronger, whichsoever it be, is to lead the weaker; and though it may be matter of infinite envy to those thou most respectests, to see thy daughter led, or rather drawn through life, in gilded carriages, with golden coronet on her brows, yet a little while and the real goal, whither the leading has been toward, appears; and then, whether they got there on wheels or barefooted, matters not the value of a broken shoestring, unless it be that they who travel a foot to any place, do mostly arrive wearier at the journey's end, but ten to one wiser than the others.

I think Lady Fitzjohn would have agreed with me, had we talked this subject over together; as it was, she took the part I hope the reader will commend her for taking, for no other reason, than that her tender feelings could not bear to see poor Meriel suffer and pine as she did. In this mind she offered her young friend every consolation she could think of, ending the whole by recommending her, not without considerable timidity, to take Raven into her confidence as a last resource.

Meriel listened to the advice with less show of surprise than Lady Fitzjohn looked for; but first thanking her adviser, Meriel replied she objected (we use her own words) "to mix herself up with so many people about it." By this, she meant to convey her sense of the delicacy of sentiments which none could share, and which, in her opinion, no woman could possibly discover to one of the opposite sex. But although this was her implied meaning, we may in secrecy inform the reader, that Miss Sigismond had, beside this, another objection, and, if possible, a more insuperable one to Lady Fitzjohn's proposal; this was no other than an inward fear that, of all people in the world, not one could hear with less pleasure than would Raven, the confession that she wished to marry Fabian; in other words, she believed that Raven himself was in love with her. To account for such an impression, and to spare Meriel the charge of vanity, we must relate what was omitted in the last chapter, how after his conversation with Mr. Sigismond, Mr. Harrod had an interview with Meriel; at which, amongst other things, he assured her, in order to anticipate and prevent the very

step now in contemplation, that Raven was deeply in love with her; that every one but herself had been perfectly acquainted with the fact any time these last three years. We will not say that Mr. Harrod succeeded quite as well as he intended in alienating two old friends; for the experienced reader would not credit an assertion, that either Meriel or any woman would think the worse of a man for concentrating his admiration upon her; yet the impossibility of encouraging it, nay, the distastefulness of any body's love but Fabian's, raised up a barrier of stiffness between the two, which had never existed before; so, to cut the business short, she absolutely declined to give the proposition another thought.

This behaviour sorely perplexed Lady Fitzjohn, especially as Meriel continued to grow worse; her spirits were now quite gone; she neither ate nor slept, smiled nor talked, nor did anything in fact like herself; at last it struck Lady Fitzjohn, and it may be wondered at that it never struck her till now, that she herself might speak to Raven and induce him, (who she knew had more influence with Mr. Sigismond than any one, and who, indeed, she

believed could bring about whatever he fairly set himself at) to effect some change which, be it what it would, must be for the better. The good little woman was in a great bustle to get her conference well over; for, in truth, vastly as she admired Raven, she could not avoid feeling a little afraid of him, as indeed she was of most people when affairs of importance involved her in the necessity of decided action, or when another's welfare depended on the skilfulness of her diplomacy. In this particular instance, over and above the nervousness excited by a general awe and very imperfect knowledge of Raven's character, she half guessed at the true cause of Meriel's unwillingness to communicate with Raven, and it may be remembered this was not the first time the idea of his attachment to the girl had crossed her mind; so that being certain, at least, of the natural warmth of his disposition, she perceived that in undertaking this embassy she was about to tread upon very ticklish ground. Frightened, however, though she was, and the more she thought the more frightened she grew, a sort of moral devotion plucked up her spirit; and putting on the

boldest air to hide her timidity from herself, she got into her pony-carriage and drove to Wyldeacre as fast as she could go. She found Raven in the garden, stripped to his shirt sleeves, digging potatoes; he laid aside his pitchfork, and soliciting excuse for his soiled hands, welcomed her with a genuine expression of pleasure, such as her presence never failed to excite; his gentleness and cordiality agreeably reassured her. She proposed entering the house; he suggested remaining in the garden. "It is all one," said she, "I can speak here as well as there." With saying no more than this, she hadn't breath enough left for another word. Raven being a man of the world, stepped aside to shut the frame of a hot-bed.

"I beg pardon," said he, "now I am prepared for the worst."

"I don't know where to begin," said Lady Fitzjohn, seriously.

"Begin in the middle," said Raven, "it's the best place."

"So I will," said the lady.

"The best stories I ever heard," said Raven, "began there."

"It were well if they ended there, too, sometimes," returned the other.

"That's as it happens."

"Quite true," said Lady Fitzjohn. But she wasn't an inch further than when she started.

"I know, my lady, you have something to tell me; is it of a birth? a marriage? or a death?"

"Raven," said she, "it is of no joking matter!"

"Do you call these joking matters, my lady? I have known sorry faces come by all of 'em."

"Ah! indeed! and heaven avert the sorrow one of them brings me here to speak about."

"Amen! though the prayer will scarce revoke immutable laws; be it a birth, and I had the choice between the accidents, I would sooner it were my death; for the other evil, that is not easy to forego, but often heavier to bear with. Come, which has happened to vex you last? When I know, I may, by studying the game of chance, guess at the next likeliest to visit you; I hope you expect no more of me than this?"

"Raven, I want to speak to you about Meriel."

"I will listen, I cannot promise to attend."

"Why not?"

"Because the thought engrosses me, and may whip my fancy round the world while we are crawling here; what has happened?"

"She is miserable, poor child!"

"I know it; have you nothing else to tell me?"

"Can this be so indifferent to you?"

"Should I weep gall, wherein would it help her?"

"You can help her if you will."

"If! here is the corner-stone of all impossibilities; if to forget were as easy as to love, volition would kick sorrow like a dog from every threshold. Preface all things that are with if's, you crown the mightiest impossibility, and call it atheism. How can I help her?"

"Speak to Mr. Sigismond; tell him what you think of Fabian; tell him how they love each other; tell him the child's life is in danger; tell him anything, so you but move him to relent."

What if Sigismond should consent, Harrod will not: and then there is no money."

"That most hateful of all difficulties! she will have mine when I die."

"My generous little lady kind! if my means were added to your's when I die! these children, if we prospered, might therefore starve in the mean time."

"But they do love each other so."

"Love!" said Raven, "is a pretty fancy; but as grandmothers and grandfathers have all said in their day, it makes full nurseries but empty mouths. Besides, it may wear out; if not, others have borne the memory of its disappointment ere now."

"Can you, who suffered so much for the image of this girl, talk thus coldly of her interests?"

"I can talk of anything, and say it any how."

"Then, who so proper as you to speak to Sigismond?"

"Have I not said, that were he as anxious for, as he is averse to, the marriage, this would not serve your purpose; moreover, let it be granted that he consents to their living at Nordefall, and that it were better to trust the future to Providence, than persist in keeping the lovers apart, you know Sigismond could ill brook interference from me; you remember our quarrel, and the promise I then gave him;

yet, notwithstanding the condition on which our friendship was patched up, his heart has never parted with all the bitterness which then filled it on my account; and do you think I have nothing to forgive?"

"You, Raven! but he is a child compared to you; his was a hasty act of injustice; to let this influence your conduct now, would be unworthy of such an one as you."

"Ha, ha! what then am I? you mistake me if you think I differ from others, save in greater weakness. I loved Meriel."

"But not with the kind of love we speak of."

"Who shall say *how* I loved her? I lost the light of heaven, she restored it to my eyes; a beautiful vision haunted my youth; Meriel grew to be in my sight, what that vision was in my memory; she was virtue, affection, wit, honesty, beauty, grace, all incarnate; her mind moulded itself insensibly to the influence of my devotion. I, by her, was transformed from a heart-withered to a hopeful man; near her, this wild solitude was a paradise; here all that was manly in me, perpetually kneeled to all that was womanly in her. I sometimes

thought it a sin to bear more for her than I had borne for heaven's sake; but it was a virtue-quickening passion, and I might bless God it was not more impure. Ere I knew her my soul was like a gem deep buried in the earth; but a ray entering it, what was hitherto void and colorless a million hues emblazed, reflecting glory through a world of thought, till all that sprang from thee, Meriel, seemed as though 'twere centred in myself. Like yon aged oak, whose shade has often cooled my heated fancy, when from its ice-bound founts the sun lets flow the sap which bursts in clustering leafy spray, the venerable tree more proudly waves its dancing crest, so I, rich in my regenerate being's fruits, deemed myself—yea, was a better man. Could I feel the edifice were now complete, I might not lament to see the scaffolding pulled down. But alas! the removal discloses only imperfection, so unsightly that I hope and think a higher aid must serve me."

For a short time neither spoke; Raven was the first to break the silence.

"Trust me," said he, earnestly, "to forward her wishes with my best endeavours."

CHAPTER XVII.

On his way to Nordefall, Raven determined to go round by Darsingham to inquire after Fabian, whom he had only once seen since that young man's accident. Barely had he set out half-an-hour when he met with an adventure which, however I may be blamed for relating it, at a moment when our history is growing, and, alas! must yet grow, more and more tragical at every page, we cannot pass over in silence; Raven, we say, had scarcely got two miles on the road, when some very profound meditations which he was wrapped up in were all of a sudden broadcast to the winds by an apparition which might well have passed for the spirit of Fear itself. This spirit was, as it happened, what is often called a ghostly adviser, and bore the name and title heretofore mentioned of the Hon. and Rev. —— Pilgrim. Almost the first intimation given and received of this

being's presence was an embrace, accompanied by a supplicatory howl for protection. On raising his eyes to discover the cause of this inordinate alarm, Raven perceived, within a few yards of them an old man, armed with a stick, coming up with all his speed to overtake the terrified clergyman. Closer investigation acquainted Raven, to his atonishment, that the pursuer was the same aged disciple of Pythagoras, with the account of whose life he had not long since been so vastly entertained. This person, when within reach, would have fallen at once upon the unfortunate Pilgrim, had not Raven, who was himself in danger of receiving the blows, seized the old man's staff with a grasp, which the other in vain attempted to stave off.

"What," said he, smiling good-naturedly, "do you not know your old friends again? Have you forgotten already the pleasant conversation we had together at the 'Mitre.' If your memory is so short, I, at least, must not forget to congratulate you on being still alive, and possessing, as it should seem, no common share of vigour and activity."

Raven hoped, by touching thus upon his infirmity, to divert the old man's anger. But

in this he was mistaken, for the allusion had the contrary effect, viz., that of heightening his fury to such a pitch that Mr. Pilgrim was thrown into the pitifullest fright by it that ever was seen. "Let me hear at least," said Raven, in a pacifying tone of voice, "what is the reason of this deadly feud? for I vow you shall not touch a hair of this reverend gentleman's head, until you have explained to me in what he has offended." At the words "reverend gentleman," the infuriated greybeard uttered an execration upon poor Pilgrim of the most terrible description, and this he accompanied with so unexpected a movement, that ere Raven could ward it aside, the clergyman received a blow upon one of his shins, which made him roar loudly with pain. After a great deal of trouble, both in the use of dexterous diplomancy and superiority of actual force, Raven procured an armistice while the old man related his grievance. I shall not repeat what the reader, if he has forgotten, may find recorded in chapter IV. Sufficiently painful is it to me, (and I am half disposed to write this page in red ink, it being one that should blush to all

eternity,) sufficiently painful is it to remind the reader of one incident in the old man's tale, to which I firmly believe the deepest sorrows of his life might be traced—I mean that of his wife's betrayal. But how overwhelmed must I be when I find myself compelled (for now I write only with the highest moral purpose in view) to disclose that the pious, though, perhaps, misjudging man, whose sanctity was the admiration of such excellent creatures as Lady Mountseer, whose sincerity even Raven admired, whose moral precepts seemed to flow from the breath of inspiration, in whose eyes all mankind were so impure that an eternity of torment would scarce suffice to defecate them, was the same who had once been the boon companion of dissipation's wildest riots, and the least pardonable of all evil doers—a corruptor of youthful innocence. O! Humanity! humanity! bedizen thyself in what coloured cloth thou wilt, when all is said and done 'tis very well for thee if thy seeming means but one-half of what it seems!

By the time Raven had completed this reflection, Pilgrim, whose conscience made a greater coward of him, if possible, than he was by

nature, had fallen on his knees in an attitude of most deplorable humility. But as this of all other attitudes was the one which placed him in the most convenient position to receive a blow, the Pythagorean instantly improved the opportunity by delivering a heavy one with all his weight upon the clergyman's head; fortunately, the most serious effect of this blow fell upon his hat; which was completely battered in by it, and was also rammed over Mr. Pilgrim's face down to his very shoulders. Upon these, many heavy blows now descended, before Raven, for laughing, could intercede to stop them. When he did so, both sides were equally exhausted; and though his protector took every care of the unhappy clergyman, he left the aged philosopher to depart without bestowing any further notice upon him.

When they were out of sight of danger Mr. Pilgrim began to comment, in a very melancholy tone of voice, upon the sinfulness of human nature. "Oh!" he groaned, "how desperately wicked is the heart of man, when he yields to the propensities of his natural disposition. Lying and slandering are the least sinful of his crimes. Should he give way to a little more passion

than provoked him to the abuse of his tongue, place but a staff in his hand, and peradventure he will spill the blood of his fellow-creature. Too surely, sir, had you not been by, this lost sheep would have murdered me in the most barbarous and brutal manner. Alas! alas! how irretrievably must he have forfeited his soul to the arch enemy of mankind." In language of this kind Mr. Pilgrim continued to address his companion, until Raven came to a path which diverged in the direction of Darsingham. Having heard quite enough of Mr. Pilgrim's discourse to enable him to imagine what the remainder would have been had he stayed longer in his company, he wished the reverend gentleman good day, and strode hastily on to find his friend.

He did not, however, reach Darsingham so soon but he had plenty of time to reflect upon the instance, which had just passed under his notice, of the propensity existing in man to be so carried away by the contemplation of another's faults as entirely to lose sight of his own. Far from setting this down to the bad side of human nature, he attributed it to a certain innate love of goodness, which inclined a man's heart

to hate what was bad, although his mental vision being somewhat obscured by selfish considerations (which, after all, his individuality in a measure forced upon him) he was unfortunately apt to discover this badness any where sooner than in himself. "Did we," thought he, "only know our own hearts, or did we even remember the many proofs we have had of their vices, surely, though this should even give us a clearer insight into the hearts of others, we should grow charitable by learning there was more weakness than wickedness, more to pity than to blame in the world."

Raven rejoiced to find Fabian recovered in health, though in spirits he was lower than his friend had ever seen him; on being asked the occasion of his melancholy, Fabian replied that "the game was up;" and in the place of further explanation took a letter from his despatch-box, which he handed Raven to read.

"My dear Mr. Harrod," so it ran—

"When I last wrote to you, I had the sincerest intention that that letter should be the last that was to pass between us on this painful subject. In a moment of weakness

and of nervous excitement I suffered myself to be surprised. Forgetful of my duty and of the unhappy consequences which the disregard of it might entail upon you as well as upon myself, I gave you the hope which I must now and for ever destroy. Nothing but a daughter's duty to her father could induce me to recall the word that had once passed my lips. But I am now so thoroughly convinced that my father will never consent to our marriage, that I have resolved to break off our engagement. If you think me heartless, you are greatly mistaken; still, I must entreat you, for your own sake, not to imagine that I am irresolute.

"I remain, my dear Mr. Harrod,

"Yours, very truly,

MERIEL SIGISMOND."

"Pithy enough this time! and not a single word of it underlined," ejaculated Raven.

"Don't you think it very cold?" said Fabian.

"Letters of this kind usually seem so," said Raven.

"But she might have said she was sorry, or, at all events, have shown some regret for

herself, if not for me. Dash it! If you had run me through with the North Pole it would not have given me such a chill as that thing there."

"Take it for a general maxim," said Raven, "the more people say, the less they feel, or, what is perhaps still nearer the truth, the more they feel, the less they say—*Curæ leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent.*"

"I don't believe she cares a dump for me, and that's the truth on't, Raven."

"The longer you keep in that mind, the better for you."

"Why? you don't think it would make any difference in my feelings, do you? No matter how she behaves now, I'm done for life. Ah!" he groaned, "you little know what it is to be in love, my dear fellow. To think that Meriel—her very name chokes me now—should give in like that. I could have sworn she was pluck to the back-bone; any woman can fall in love, and change her mind, but I did hope Meriel would turn out a trump."

All this was said with manner meant to hide feeling. The truth is, Fabian's heart was in his mouth the whole time, and had he not carried off his real distress with a

quantity of rhodomontade like the above he could not have spoken of the subject without bursting into tears. Raven perceived this flippant and excited manner was intended to pass current for his usual vein of drollery; and feeling the greatest sympathy with his friend's grief, informed him that he would go that very afternoon to see if anything could be done to bring Mr. Sigismond to consent to the match. At this unexpected prospect of a favourable turn Fabian jumped up, and, seizing Raven by the hand, cried out, "By Jove you are the best of friends Raven! There's not another person in the world has so much influence with old Sigismond, as you. Do but work him as you know how, and we all shall be as merry as sticklebacks yet."

"Take care! take care!" said Raven. "The skilfullest surgeon cannot mend a broken neck, though he may stave off death for an hour. The movement of a muscle counterfeits life often long after life is extinct."

"Oh! a plague on your metaphors! Do you palaver old Sigismond, and if he wont listen I'll never speak to him again."

Raven could not find it in him to dam up the boisterous flood of youthful ardor which the experienced well know dies away but too soon in the natural course of things. So, turning away with much the heavier heart of the two, he left the youth to await the issue of his mission. Scarcely had he left the house when he re-entered to give Fabian a letter that he had received the previous day from their old acquaintance the Mexican padre. "You see," said Raven, "he has kept his word, and means to pay us a visit. He comes to England by a West India Mail Steamer, and goes from London to Cadiz. He says, however, he will stay a fortnight in this country, a few days of which he will give to us."

"When does he arrive?"

"The steamer came in yesterday as I see by the paper. His letter, sent by the last packet, has for a fortnight travelled in search of me. I hope he will find his way more expeditiously. I have prepared for his reception. It will be pleasant enough to see the honest man again."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It is in no man's power, I thank Heaven most heartily therefore, to be always serious; but there are places upon which mirth is quite out of place, and this chapter is one of them. When Raven entered Mr. Sigismond's studio, his mind was oppressed with a tumult of ideas which the purpose of his visit tended much to heighten; he found the old gentleman with his arms clasping his dummy in an attitude of the warmest affection. Both the artist and the dummy stood in front of a cheval-glass; the old gentleman was seeking a graceful posture for the figures of a new picture.

How many antics do we amuse ourselves with in private, which would appear ridiculous to a looker-on! nay, if the looking glasses of those dignified and queenly beings, at whose feet princely pride is ever ready to kneel, could but speak, wisdom would wonder less that beauty should have been the cause of war over the whole earth

before Helen was; but she might blush more to know how its arts were practised on the surface of a senseless mirror. Mr. Sigismond blushed on his own account, which was unfortunate for Raven, for, detect a man's weakness, and most likely he will seize the first opportunity to make you feel his strength. Mr. Sigismond received his visitor coldly.

"Ten years ago," began Raven, "I gave you my word never again to interfere where relationship gave you the sole legal right of protection. Till this moment I have kept my promise. Again I come to speak to you of Meriel:—one moment, sir; when you have heard me I will listen to your objections. I have said, legally none but yourself had the smallest pretension to be her guardian; nevertheless, by nature, my interest, as you know, was deeply founded. She has been as a daughter to you, it is true; but before you had ever seen her, she was placed in my arms by her dying mother: I then swore to devote every worldly interest to her welfare. The hour is arrived when that vow has become more peremptory than my subsequent promise;—still hear me. Ten years have elapsed since I endeavoured

to influence your authority over Meriel. I was hastier then than I am now. I used language which my judgment had too little share in. But I paid the penalty. You exercised your legal right. I spoke no more until to-day. Believe me, it is not willingly I run the risk of provoking your displeasure, or put it in your power, a second time, to remind me how irrefragably I am disparted from one whom it would be unnatural in me not to love; nor think that I could have done so, until all petty thoughts of self were obliterated from my mind. Meriel loves young Harrod. You dislike the youth, because of his name, and, therefore, withhold your consent to their union. I, however, know the son as intimately as you the father. Think what you will of him, he is worthy of Meriel, were she your own child."

"Could I love her more if she were mine! Oh, no! It is because I dote on her, Raven, that I tremble, lest she should become the wife of a heartless profligate—a wretch whose wickedness his own bad father is forced to reprobate. Breathe not to me the name of Harrod. Better a thousand times her youth-

ful days be spent in sorrowing, than that her very soul should risk perdition by such a link to hell as this. No! Raven, I have been deaf, God knows with what effort, to her appeals. I have turned my eyes from her heart-rending looks, whose beseeching sadness haunts me when she is not by. I have seen her, seen her pine and weep, when she did least suspect it. Yet, all this touched me not so to the quick as her smiles put on to spare me the anguish which I inflict on her. And would you now pretend her torture is inflicted by my obstinacy and prejudice? that my judgment serves but to deceive me at my greatest need? that I know not a villain from an honest man? Out upon it sir! let me hear no more of this, lest I forget the goodness of your motive, foreseeing the dishonour you would bring upon my house."

"Be it so," said Raven; "but before I leave you, listen to my words. When last we discussed Meriel's prospects, you all but drove me from your door, because I too earnestly pressed my conviction that she, poor child, should be made acquainted with her own unfortunate history, ere she reached an age when the dis-

closure would burst upon her with horror. I warned you that when she discovered what you obstinately determined to conceal, a daughter's love would—"

"It is impossible any one should be so cruel as to undeceive her!" cried the old man, in an agony.

"We will hope so now," said Raven. "But should she ever learn the truth, the change in her feelings may not be softened by a remembrance of the sacrifices she is now making, under the supposition that they are called for by the sacred duty of filial love."

"Never, never can she charge me with not having acted for her welfare—"

"As you judge it to be. Not, however, as I believe, not perchance as she may think hereafter. In any case, I so lament that you rejected the advice offered ten years ago, that, lest then the manner of my preferring it closed your ears against me, I now most calmly repeat my entreaties, that you will pause before you break this dear child's heart. That Fabian Harrod is unworthy of her he loves is as false as the falsest word his father ever uttered. You have not, it is impossible you

should have, any proof of his dishonesty, beyond the assertion of this scheming and unnatural parent. I have known the lad from a child, as I have known Meriel; and can you resist my conviction, when I propose to stake her happiness upon its validity."

"Proof!" cried Mr. Sigismond, "I have had too many proofs that you are deceived in Harrod's son. Has he not boasted over her conquered affections, making this a prelude to more execrable triumphs?"

"To whom has he made these boasts?"

"To whom?" stammered Mr. Sigismond. "How know I who may or may not be the dissolute colleagues of his depravity!"

"The most intimate of them all stands before you, Mr. Sigismond. Have you no more tangible charge to lay against him?"

"Is not the simple fact of his surreptitiously undermining her guileless heart enough in itself to prove his baseness?"

"You seem to forget that this preference dates from her infancy," said Raven, "that his admiration has ripened with his manhood; call you this most natural, most innocent, this time-mortised bond, deceitful undermining?

I beg you, sir, to search within yourself, lest the habitual entertainment of this animosity has warped your judgment. A little thought will convince you how this bias was first planted in your mind; a little more will tell you how prejudice, like the tropical mangrove, grows till it shuts out the light of heaven, and twines its roots in festering and deadly swamps. To persist in this your resolution, you play the very cards which he, whom you dislike, has put into your hands. Pardon me, sir, but you would become the instrument wherewith he'd work his selfish schemes, gladdening him with the very knowledge of your sufferings."

"By heaven! can this be so! am I the dupe of one I never trusted! and is it possible, that flesh and blood of his could be all that he himself is not; all, nay, but in part, what you declare him. Oh, Raven! should you too deceive me? Fabian is your friend; is it not for his sake more than Meriel's? may it not be from some aversion to his father that you take this part, or, forgive the suspicions of a harrassed mind, the anxious terrors of a doting old man, does no ill-will to me yet linger rankling in your breast? Hate me, curse me,

if you will; but, oh, Raven! for her mother's sake, do not be false to the child."

"I forgive your suspicions, none know the secrets of man's heart, but God and himself. If this thing can be, hinder it not."

"You know how my estate is hampered, how little I have to give her; and if Harrod has, as you assert, slandered his own son to prevent this marriage, what hope have we of means from his coffers? He would let both starve, did his son act wilfully against him."

"It is no more than he has already threatened."

"What! he assured me, his son laughed at his apprehensions, confessing to a flirtation, but scorning a more serious attachment."

"That you believed him is all I wonder at. Fabian spoke boldly out; the father jeered, then threatened. Fabian answered like a man. Let him but win his love, he would trust to God and his own exertions to replace the dependence on his father's aid. To you alone he looks with anxious hope; with Meriel he has already communicated."

"Yes, and I grieve to say, has seduced her into a clandestine correspondence."

"Every letter she has written to him since his return to England has passed through my hands; nor need she blush were all the world to read them. She has written but twice; once, returning some hair and a miniature, sent in reality by his father (the act was worthy of the man), to provoke her with his son's audacity. A second time from Granstein, pitilessly denying him all hope, assigning as an imperious reason her duty to her *father!*"

"Poor child! how in thought I wronged her! but say, how is the insuperable difficulty to be met?"

"The want of means?"

"And Harrod's objection."

"Had you the means," said Raven, "Harrod's objection might be waved; but not having them, is there no way of moving Harrod? think you he has any latent aversion to the match, beyond his desire to grasp the Carrol property?"

"Can he," asked Mr. Sigismond, "be aware *why* Meriel does not inherit Nordefall?"

"If only he knows for certain that she is to be a pauper, this is enough for him. The true reason for the estates going to your nearest male heir, can scarcely be known to any but

ourselves and Lady Fitzjohn. Harrod may, for aught I can tell, suspect a worse tale than the real one."

"If Harrod did but know, (Mr. Sigismond turned his light eyes round the room), if he did but know to what extent he is in my power, he would obey my smallest wish."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Raven, incredulously. "Then why not use your power?"

"No, no! God forbid! that trust will I not abuse to save even Meriel from unhappiness; no living soul, but—"

Here Mr. Sigismond's words were drowned by the clamorous vociferations of a screeching voice, whose cracked tones rose in shrillness as the sounds of footsteps in the passage drew towards the *studio* door.

"Na, na, ye shall not stop old Molly! I will see un and speak to un, for the worst ye can do me!" and with these words the old hag, pushing Meriel aside, flung into the middle of the room.

To explain this interruption, which startled both Raven and Mr. Sigismond, we must acquaint the reader with the circumstance which brought it about. In the forenoon of this same day, Isaac Sandford had been accused by Davy,

and examined by Mr. Sigismond, for assault and battery on the person of the mole-catcher. Without entering into the evidence produced before the magistrate, or considering the justice of the conviction, enough for our purpose is it to relate, that Isaac Sandford was sentenced to be tried at the next petty sessions, until which event he was to be in gaol. The instant Molly heard the issue of the examination she hurried up to the Priory, determined, as we shall see, to give the offending magistrate a bit (if not the whole) of her mind. Now, directly the conference terminated between Lady Fitzjohn and Raven, the former hastened to hug Meriel in her arms, and assure her unhappy young friend, "that Raven had undertaken to see Mr. Sigismond, and she hoped and believed, indeed she felt quite sure, all would be made right that very afternoon." This piece of intelligence pretty nearly threw poor Meriel into a brain fever, so sudden was the reaction from despair to expectation, and the interval spent by this sweet creature between Lady Fitzjohn's communication and Raven's arrival, was one of such dreadful suspense, that I do not think she could have

been in a more pitiable condition than she was then.

How she watched, listened, strained every sense to catch the first signs of her intercessor's approach! how her heart throbbed, how her head reeled, how icy-cold her hands and feet became, how she trembled all over when he had entered the house and she heard the studio door open and shut, knowing that now—now her fate—her love—her passionate love hung by its last strand to be resolved for ever! O God! who that has lived moments such as these, can ever outlive them? When thousands of after-pangs have piled themselves like a grave-mound over this one short hour, when thousands of after-joys have blown like annual spring flowers upon this tumulus, beneath, still lie the ever-sacred remnants of the mightiest of earthly passions; it was the first that made life reality; it is the last that makes death ideal! What wonder then Meriel should do her utmost to prevent this abominable old woman's interruption; yet, the more she resisted the less was Molly driven back; once in the room, I would like to see who could stop the old thing's tongue. "'Tis you I want,"

she screamed, pointing with her bony hand at the now almost sightless magistrate. "What have ye sent my son to the gaol for? Think ye, bekase the Lord hath suffered one of my children to be evil intreated by tyrants, that the mouth of wickedness shall not be stopped at last. Silence me! I'll not silence, though ye call me fifty hags; through oppression, and plague and trouble I am brought low, but He shall deliver me out of distress, and His enemies will He curse for ever. But I came not here to warn ye as a messenger from Him, I came to speak out to ye of my own self, for my days are numbered, and, thou, weak old man, shalt yet hear me. Na, I will not be turned out till I have said it, so hear me. 'Tis long sin ye did the first mischief to me and mine; ye transported one of my sons, he was innocent, ay, more innocent than any of ye; but, why did ye transport him? I will tell; ye transported him for a crime he never committed, ye transported him bekase he was the witness of a crime that another did commit. Ah! ye are ready to hear me now, your own guilty conscience tells ye I speak what ye cannot deny; listen then, for it concarns ye all. Harrod

shot his uncle; my son Jack saw him point the gun; Harrod knew it, charged him with poaching, purchased false witnesses, and you, you Sigismond, took their evidence and convicted him! since then I have owed ye ill; ye fed and housed us to make amends for what ye did. I ate your food and warmed my old limbs beneath a roof of your's; but I hated ye, ay! and when I took the alms from your daughter's hands, I repeated the prior's curse upon her head, that as you had ruined one of my flesh and bone I might help to ruin yourn. Know, that one unjust act of your's put bad blood between thine and mine; but for this, Isaac might ha' been an honester man; but for this, I would not have countenanced his dishonesty; but you, and a worse than you are to blame; and now ye would visit your own sins upon me again."

By this time the old crone was so exhausted for want of breath, she was forced to stop and cough; for a minute, the three who composed her audience stood in silence, looking from one to the other, each with a peculiar expression of astonishment, caused by the wonderful charge Molly had brought against

Mr. Harrod. The instant she had sufficiently recovered herself, she turned in a most marked way towards Meriel, and then pausing only to be quite free of her cough, she with a sort of hollow croak, waving her withered arm up and down as she spoke, slowly uttered the CURSE; then turning, without a glance at the others, left them with poor Meriel to apply the terrible meaning hidden within her words. Raven was the first to move; excusing himself without ceremony he abruptly went out of the room. We will follow him presently. Let us first see what passed between Meriel and the old gentleman, whom she still believed to be her father; shocked, terrified and bewildered, she flew to Mr. Sigismond the instant they were alone.

"What" she breathlessly exclaimed, "is the meaning of this awful woman's tale?"

"Meriel," said he, "she has spoken what I dare not, will not think to be truth; and yet, great heaven! if it should be true."

"True," exclaimed Meriel, in an agony, "if what is true? speak, father."

"My child, do you not shrink from the thought of loving the son of a murderer?"

"Father," she said, controlling her emotion with a desperate effort, "forbear to throw out these dark hints, you distress me; speak to me without this mystery, or I shall fear the ravings of this exasperated hag have too seriously affected you."

"Meriel," and the old man took her hand, "you know that the last possessor of Darsingham, died by his nephew's hand."

"I know that Mr. Harrod's gun was accidentally discharged, and that the consequence proved fatal to his uncle; what of this?"

"And you have heard Molly Sandford's story about her son?"

"Can you, my father, be so weak? can your judgment be so inflamed by personal aversion, as to credit this idle babbling? or rather, do you not tremble to lay, even in thought, the suspicion of murder upon one whom you cannot, will not judge impartially? Oh! let not your own child witness a fault that can betray her father into such a heaven-offending thought."

"Meriel, Meriel, your words cut me like knives; oh! if you knew the secrets of my heart, your reproaches would not end here;

you would hate, you would curse him whom you call your father!"

"Nay, dearest," she twined her arms about the old man's neck as she spoke, and smiled at once. "Do not speak so; my own terrors, my own foolish heart hurried me into too much warmth, too much earnestness of manner: whatever happens, be the truth as appalling to me as it may, I never can forget that you are my own dear, dear father."

Mr. Sigismond shuddered as though a serpent had coiled itself about him in the place of this innocent child; he shrunk away from her.

"Meriel," said he, after a pause, during which he appeared to undergo a severe mental struggle, "when this denunciation against Harrod was forced upon me, I was talking with Raven about you; for reasons you will never learn, Raven takes the deepest interest in your welfare. You may, or may not, have observed a certain coldness that has long existed between us. However this be, he is one whose honor and integrity, whose heart and understanding I have always most highly prized. To him you owe it, that my estimate

of Fabian is changed. Through him I discovered that the baseness I attributed to the son was due to the father; whose wiliness, with all my distrust, I had yet not sufficiently guarded myself against. Raven's word and Raven's discrimination, in short, are the guarantees I have accepted for young Harrod's character; of your attachment I wanted no proofs, and but for one obstacle, I was preparing to withdraw my objection to your marrying the man of your own choice; that obstacle was, the want of means; you have not been brought up as the heiress of this estate, you have always understood that it passes to a distant, and, to you, an unknown relative, who is the nearest male heir in succession. But you have, I fear, not known, how poorly it will be in my power to provide for you; my estates are embarrassed, my expenses have nearly equalled my income, permitting me only to invest a trifling surplus as your fortune. This difficulty might not have been so stubborn a one could your husband have supplied the deficit, either by his father's liberality or by his own exertions. But Harrod is even more resolutely opposed to his son's marriage with you, than ever I was to

your becoming the wife of his son. He is a cold, a severe, man; and the threats he has menaced Fabian with, should Fabian marry you, would give him more pleasure than pain to carry into execution."

"Surely, father, you are too harsh upon him; Harrod has ever been most friendly, most kind to me; give but your consent, I am sure he will listen to me. Fabian and I will beseech him together; he cannot withstand his son's earnest wishes, he will not turn away from my entreaties, for I will forget my pride," said she, smiling, "and will use a woman's art to win him over. I know he cannot resist me."

"Child, child! his kindness to you has been the tenderness of a basilisk; he wanted your confidence and he obtained it, as he best knew how. No! do not deceive yourself, Fabian has pleaded his own cause, as I learn from Raven, both with courage and with gentleness; the only reply he has received has been a most sincere promise of disinheritance. Your marriage therefore makes him a beggar, and gives you not wherewith to keep him. My life is too short to count upon, and it would be mad-

ness to trust to the generosity of my successor, whom I only know by name."

Meriel's spirits, which had begun to flow into their old channels at the first part of Mr. Sigismond's speech, now received so sad a check, that she could no longer restrain her tears; her weeping, as may readily be supposed, only served to heighten the anguish of him whose words had excited her grief. The poor old man could scarcely see the white handkerchief which concealed her face, but he heard enough to convince him of the depth of her woe. Two or three times he murmured something to himself, which was not distinct. At last, he said aloud, "I can bear this no longer, whether he be guilty or not, God knows; I have heard enough to absolve me, to justify my suspicions, and be the consequences what they may, she shall not suffer more torture through that wicked man. Meriel, I have something to say to you, calm yourself; I have a secret which I am about to reveal to you. Are we alone?"

"Yes, father."

"See that there be no listeners in the next room," said he.

"There is no one there father."

"Meriel," he began, "you have often heard me speak of my intimacy with the Mr. Harrod who was shot. At his own request I attended him in his last moments. On the day preceding that of his death, having dismissed every other person from the room, he asked me, upon my honor, what my impressions were respecting his nephew's character. I replied that our acquaintance was so slight, I could not pretend to give an opinion one way or the other."

"Do you think," said he, "I have acted wisely in choosing him for my heir?"

"I hoped the event might prove the discretion of his choice; but added, that no one had had better opportunities of considering the young man's disposition than himself."

"'Tis these opportunities," said he, "which of late have given me some uneasiness. I have observed an obsequiousness in his manner, which is neither becoming in a relation, nor indicative, in my estimation, of genuine regard. Instances of his selfishness, where others were concerned, have not tended to raise my faith in the sincerity of his devotion, when

I alone have been the object of it. In brief, now that it is almost too late to change, I begin to wish I had destined, as my successor, one more likely to fulfil, with equity and virtue, the responsibilities of a wealthy position. I have solicited your presence at my death-bed," he added, "that I might have the advice of one capable of deciding upon a delicate point of conscience. Before the accident happened which, by God's will, has so suddenly terminated my life, I had partly conceived an intention to make my nephew heir only to my funded property. The landed estates, and the bulk of my fortune, I hoped to find a worthier inheritor for. By the hands of this nephew I die. But lest I should have to answer for one addition to the many sins which, in a long life, I have already committed, I sincerely desire (and have earnestly prayed) that I may not be influenced in my decision, respecting this disposal of my property, by a vain regret at being thus hurried from a world of pleasure to one where all pleasures must be accounted for. These," said the dying man, "are the thoughts which have burdened me until the last few hours.

But whether from the sinking of my spirit my brain has grown more imperfect in its functions, or whether the evil nature which clings to us till the last, has put the dreadful suspicion into my head (God, in His infinite mercy, pardon me if it be so!) I am racked with a new fear which I shudder to breathe at the awful moment which suspends my dissolution." Here a mortal agony, occasioned by his state of mind, deprived him of speech for the space of nearly half-an-hour. I supposed death had overtaken him before he had been able to confide to me what I now became extremely curious to learn. Gradually, however, the vigour of his constitution restored him to sense. He seemed anxious to complete his revelation ere a similar attack might for ever deprive him of the power to do so. "Sigismond," said he, solemnly, "suspicions have crossed me, that I lie here neither by accident, nor through carelessness."

"Great Heaven!" I exclaimed, "you cannot suspect your nephew of—" my tongue refused to utter the fearful word.

"Murder!" he whispered. "Such is the horrible idea which possesses me. It may be

but a phantom, a fitful shadow cast upon my mental sight by the flickering of life's lamp. If it be no more than this I may be pardoned for it; and none will suffer by the act it prompts me to." Here he bade me take pen, and dictating a fresh will, I subscribed my name as one witness to it, his old servant was summoned to become the other. "Now," said he, when the work was completed, and we were again alone, "take this deed; if hereafter, (be the period howsoever remote,) you have sufficient reason to doubt, as I have doubted, let this my last will, cancel the one which will appear valid when I am gone."

In vain I represented to him my horror, I can use no other term, at finding myself left as the sole arbiter of another's innocence or guilt; especially where one decision involved the proving of a heinous crime. The only ground on which at last I accepted the trust, was a secret resolution to conceal for ever the instrument of my detestable power; and, come what might, never to form any opinion either way, since I knew no evidence existed upon which any human understanding could infallibly decide.

"I have heard," he concluded (he spoke no more afterwards.)

"I have heard that the eye when glazed, and no longer capable of discerning material forms, is sometimes gifted with a supernatural vision. I know not whether my sentiments are imbued with prophetic spirit, but the nearer my end approaches, the more forcibly am I persuaded that a day will come when this deed will be blessed by the consequences hereafter to flow from it."—"My child!" said Mr. Sigismond to Meriel, who stood motionless with amazement, "it is not possible for you to judge impartially of Molly Sandford's confirmation of the fears of that poor man, but I have less cause to quell my doubts. I have no reason to give; my power is plenary. Say to me, 'let it be so,' and Harrod's merciless reign is ended from this day forth."

"I do not comprehend you," returned Meriel, with an air of strange bewilderment."

"Harrod, I say, shall consent, or—"

"You will ruin him, believing him to be a murderer?"

"I tell you, child, I have no reasons to give. My suspicions will not be published to the world. Harrod will only suffer by

them, in so much as he persist relentlessly in being the barrier to your happiness. For his ruin, know that were I to oust him, the deed which disinherits the father, makes no other than his son possessor in his stead; Fabian becomes his own master, and if he be what you take him for, the best consequences may be expected from the change."

"Father! father! delude not yourself by these sophistries. It is my interest which blinds you to the nobler course. Think you I could be made happy by an act that would bring down a parent's malediction on his only child? by an act implying a charge against that parent of the most monstrous of crimes. Think you a God of love and mercy blesses the fruits of hatred or revenge? No! If, for my sake alone, you are impelled, learn that rather than be a cause of so much evil, I would court for life the anguish which sad circumstance has given me already the bitter taste of. I can trust Him to comfort, by-and-bye, the heart which may need its trials for a season.—But where is this unlucky will, father, which places such temptation in your path?"

"What would you with it, since you will

not let me use it as, had he lived, its writer would himself have done?"

"Burn it! as, could he speak from where all human passions cease, its writer would now bid you do. Burn it, and seek, by nobler means, to come at nobler ends. See (for I know you no longer are opposed) see Mr. Harrod, tell him—"

"To that man, Meriel, I cannot, will not, be a supplicant. Do not ask me."

"What, father! are you so ready to threaten one whom you will not first ask with common gentleness. Nay, come, this is but an impulse. Reflect dearest! you give to pride and rancour the mastery over qualities, you most highly prize in others. Should Mr. Harrod be all you fancy him, is this to make you less generous? This were taking for your model, the badness which you abhor. Besides"—here she put on the winningest way—"forget Mr. Harrod, dear, and think only of your Meriel."

"Best of beings!" exclaimed the weak old man, "everything but you shall be forgotten."

CHAPTER XIX.

Raven ran at his utmost speed, directly he was outside the house; nor stopped to take breath till he had overtaken Molly, who, considering her decrepitude, got over the ground at a very rapid pace. She turned on hearing his footsteps to see who followed her. Raven was amused to observe this proof of her quick ears, generally she feigned deafness. She saw that his eye took notice of some sticks which stuck out from under her red cloak. "They're nought," croaked she, in a defensive tone, "but a few rotten ones; I picked them out o' the road."

Raven smiled, for he had seen her, in the distance, breaking down a bough as she passed through the shrubbery. "Never mind the sticks," said he, "I want to talk to you of other matters."

"If it's the rent of the cottage you're wanting,—though 't aint yourn, is it?"

"No! it's Mr. Harrod's, you know."

"Ay, ay! one might know that where misery was he'd have sum'at to do wid it; but let *his* children be vagabonds, and beg their bread; let 'em seek it out in desolate places, —as mine have had to do bekase of him."

"'Tis about your children I came to see you Molly."

"Ye'll find one of 'em in the gaol!" said she, bitterly, "As for Jack, ye heard me say this day, what had become of him; as for t' other he can take care o' hisself, he can."

"I think," said Raven, "I can save Isaac the disgrace of going to prison, though he, perhaps, deserved the punishment; still, if you particularly wished it, Molly, for your sake I might manage to get him out of the scrape, either by paying the fine, or by pacifying Davy."

"If I wished it, did ye say? Do you think then, bekase I am old and withered, or bekase I am poor, or even bekase I curse them as curses me, that I forget I be a mother? forget I was young once, and fuller of love than I be now full of hate? that them hard, strong-growed men, wi' their

prisons and transportations, were once helpless prattling innocents, drawing life from the breast of me, a girlish mother. Na, na! go burn your learning-books, Mr. Raven; for if they wont teach ye how the differences are not so mighty great between one of us and another, they will not do ye much good, sir—not they."

"Then Molly," said Mr. Raven, "I will do my best for Isaac. I wish it had been in my power to have done as much for your other son."

"Do you?" asked the old woman, bending her scrutinizing glance upon him. "It might not be unpossible some day yet to do some'ut for un. His time is nigh up now, and if he came back here he'd want friends, mayhap."

"Well! you know I am a magistrate, Molly, and if what you told Mr. Sigismond this afternoon be true, Jack would have a claim upon us all."

"Oh, sir! if them there was the last words ever I were to speak, they was as true as gospel."

"Then I repeat, some redress might be made to him; and between ourselves, Molly, his evidence would be very valuable to me."

"'T would, would it? Well! there's no saying how soon he might be here. 'Deed, I would'nt swear but a might be in England this minute, for wanst I heerd he 'tended to escape from them parts."

"I would give much more than you might suppose, to see him."

"You want his evidence agin Harrod for the girl's sake?" said Molly, interrogatively. "How is it ye are playing this game for another, Raven?"

"Old woman, pry not into my purposes; let me see your son the instant you hear of his arrival, be he escaped, or be his time of transportation accomplished; if he will then further my designs, I not only swear to protect him, but to secure your future comfort."

"My comfort matters not; a few days, and comfort and discomfort are past for me; but if ye were false to him, Raven—"

"False! can you mistrust me when my self-interest is at stake; more than this, have I the name amongst you for falseness?"

"Maybe not, and maybe I will trust ye. See," she said, pointing to the west, "the light of this day is nearly out. Them

black clouds will make a dark and, like enough, rainy night on't. Three hours hence seek me in the lane, we shall then see how far each can help the other."

Leaving the crone to pursue her way, Raven bent his steps in the direction of the "Mitre." There he found Isaac in the custody of constable Hodges, which worthy was making his final and tardy preparations for conveying the handcuffed footman to —— bridewell, in a spring-cart. Master Hodges was not so anxious to take a ten mile drive, on a bad road, in company with a fellow who, unfettered, was more than a match for two such as he, but that he obeyed without the least hesitation the magisterial authority which was interposed in the prisoner's behalf. Davy, however, was by no means so easily persuaded of the propriety of this proceeding; not that he cared a farthing about the legality of it, which he pretended to stickle for, but that he dreaded, with very sound cause, the vengeance thus unexpectedly let loose upon him; and so lively a recollection did he bear of the fisty-cuffing he had been previously subjected to, that his terror made him expostu-

late vehemently against this revocation of Mr. Sigismond's sentence. Unfortunately for his sake his audience unanimously sided against him. Let alone the weight attached to Raven's decision, Hodges, whose duty constituted the question at issue, was, for reasons above stated, bent on staying at home, if such an arrangement were possible. As to the culprit himself, he promised most solemnly to be a pattern of virtue for the remainder of his days, imprecating misfortunes, much too shocking to repeat, upon his head "If e'er a man should catch him at that, or the likes again." But by far the most impetuous pleader, and certainly the one whose voice rose in the strife above all others, was the redoubted landlady; who, despite the dread inspired by her husband in the minds of bad little boys, and such vagrants who had never seen the constable of the parish, regarded her spouse with the same watchful jealousy which protected her parlour furniture from dust, her crockery from the fingers of careless service-maids, her milk from the cat, or any other article of personal property from the profanation of unprivileged hands.

"Who was Mister Davy, she should like to know? who was he, as dared gainsay the words of a magistrate; if she was on the bench, she'd send him to the right-abouts in less than no time; besides, if the man was to be took to Bridewell he could go, if the magistrates thought fit, as well to-morrow as to-night; for her part she didn't see where the advantage lay of keeping a man out of his bed, of a wet night (he a family man, too), for the sake of any scoundrel living. Master Hodges, (as Mr. Raven no doubts well knowed), had been laid up with the rheumatics in the legs, the best part of last winter, and if so be he was to get another 'tack, she wouldn't answer for his life, not she, let alone when a man was took with rheumatics in his legs he wasn't fit for nothing, and of that she knew the inconvenience, (having the whole of the inn to do for), as well as another."

In this strain she ran on so glibly, that Davy had not a chance more than a single other person in the room, of saying a syllable. The honest mole-catcher, however, was somewhat consoled, by finding that Isaac would not be set at liberty till Raven had seen Mr. Sigis-

mond, when the prisoner was to be sworn in to keep the peace, under such penalties as should there and then be found adequate for Davy's bodily security. A piece of gold slipped into his hand went some length with Davy, as an earnest of Raven's good faith.

And now, reader, if thou wilt wrap thy imagination in waterproof, we will imagine three hours to have passed since we parted with Molly Sandford, and step down the dark and sloppy lane, to rejoin her with Raven, according to appointment. Squish, squash, drizzle, patter, drench. The old woman never made a better prophecy in her life, than about that bank of threatening clouds at sun-down. The rain poured straightly, only slanting into Raven's face and neck (he had no umbrella) when occasionally an opening in the high fences of the lane let in a sudden gust of wind to meet him. So dark was it, that he had two or three times to feel for the gates into the fields, to learn whereabouts he had got to. 'Twas a nasty walk for him, every now and then he put his foot into a pool, or a rut, that took him over the shoes; and, in short, by the time he reached the cottage, every thread about him was like

a sponge full of water. He knocked at the door then tried to open it, the door was locked. But he had not long to wait; Molly appeared, then letting herself out, shut up the house, and silently led the way towards Nordefall.

Neither man nor woman uttered syllable till they arrived at the Priory ruins; here his guide, using great precautions to avoid falling, took Raven by the arm, and having conducted him to the mouth of the cave mentioned elsewhere in these volumes, made a noise so closely resembling the hooting of an owl, that at any other moment Raven would have taken it for the cry of that melancholy bird. The call was answered by just such another from the hollow vaults beneath them; and in a few minutes a light approached the opening, a ladder was set up from below, and, Molly descending first, both entered the retreat of the escaped convict.

The vault extended some forty or fifty yards under ground; at the end of it was a square chamber or cell, with groined ceiling, and niches, or rather arched recesses, in its walls. Whether or not this and similar chambers had formerly served for the Priory cellars, and had

then contained such ale as never since was brewed, such butts of Malmsey, Canary and Malvoisie as only those men presented to the Holy Church, who hoped therewith to wash out deeds too dark for the Confessional, Raven could no more than surmise. However this was, never since those Medieval times, so thought he, had these old buildings been turned to such good account as now. In the first place, the chamber and vault were separated by a blanket, nailed up in the ancient door-way. For furniture, a table stood in the middle of the cell, upon it were three glass tumblers, a black bottle, a jug of water, a small jar of tobacco, some clean pipes, a copy of "Paul Clifford," some sheets of "Reynolds's Magazine," a volume of "Fox's Martyrs," and a life-preserver; round the table were placed two chairs and a stool. In one corner of the cell lay a matrass, well covered with the finest blankets; an air-gun and a common fowling-piece, rested side by side in another; at the foot of these were a bundle of wire snares, thrown carelessly over a dead hare; an original stone shelf happened to be fixed into one of the recesses, on this (not a single object escaped Raven's quick observing

eye) lay two silver teaspoons, a silver fork and tablespoon, several common knives, and a quantity of ammunition for the guns. The whole apartment was well lighted by a couple of spermaceti candles. It takes but an instant to see, what it may occupy some minutes to describe. The owner of this comfortable apartment noticed Raven's scrutiny, rapid and cursory though he made it; the observation did not disconcert him, he merely filled and lighted a pipe, seated himself at the table, and seemed to wait impassively for the comments of his visitor. Raven said nothing, but followed the example of his host at the instigation of old Molly, and all three set to work to draw and puff, puff and draw, till they well nigh filled the little space with a cloud of tobacco-smoke.

"It's good baccy, aint it?" presently remarked the escaped convict.

"Very," was Raven's laconic answer.

"Are you wet?" inquired the other, after a pause.

"Rather," said Raven.

"Help yourself," said Jack, pushing the black bottle across the table.

Raven poured some spirit into a tumbler. "Gin?" said he, adding water thereto.

"H'm!" nodded the other, without taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"Hollands," said Raven, after taking a draft.

"H'm," answered Jack; "help 'self mother; no water for her, sir," he added, seeing Raven pass the jug. "Old uns likes it neat."

After this, a long pause ensued; while it lasted, the eyes of Jack constantly met Raven's penetrating looks; whenever this happened, each changed the direction of his glances. Both were desirous "to know their man," as the expression goes, but both had travelled (on different businesses to be sure), to the Antipodes and back again; therefore both had met, as all who travel thus far must meet, men ready to take the very worst advantage of frankness and credulity, and since each was desirous of making the best use he could of the other, each, though anxious to inspire the other with a favourable impression, was secretly resolved to reserve his power until he had secured the service which that power was to be the price of.

It was a curious situation these two men

were placed in; yet not at all an uncommon one, though formed under circumstances differently related to these. Raven, the man in authority, had it in his power to protect the outlaw; Jack, the only witness of an enemy's guilt, had it in his power to further Raven's designs; yet, Raven, having got Jack's evidence, might not keep his word, and Jack having got Raven's protection, or money, or reward, in whatsoever shape, might not be prepared to risk the law, or brave the vengeance of the denounced Harrod. All this was well considered by each of these men; whom experience, I am sorry to say, had filled with any sentiment rather than trust respecting their fellow-creatures. But it happened in this case, as it happens in thousands upon thousands of others, viz., that they were both of them vastly over wise; for so anxious was each to attain his own end, that had they openly made their overtures at once, these would have been speedily accepted; to the saving of much scheming, much mistrust, much bad and uncharitable feeling which, however they may advance any one project, do no honour to the most successful man ever born.

"You seem pretty comfortable," recommenced Raven, throwing out by this perfectly natural remark an exquisitely delicate feeler, to test Jack's love of freedom.

"Well," said Jack, "it's rather lonesome in the day time." Then catching an inkling of the other's trap, he added, "though woluntary imprisonment in any den is better than compulsory, when you're best taken care of, aint it, sir?"

"So it is," said Raven, "and then, I suppose, you get out as much o' nights as you want to."

"Yes," drawled Jack, "oh, yes; yet, after all, its more like the natur of jackalls and hyenas to be a sneaking about in the dark than like an honest man; and it's plaguy hard to be drove to that for the crime of another. Though sure, my case aint the only one in the world, there's many a chap might ha' turned out well, if a bad un hadn't been the ruin of him.

"If that be your fate, it is a hard one I admit," said Raven.

"Whether 'tis so or no," returned Jack, "he who made me what I am, wouldn't like

to see me again, I know that precious well! and that looks like as though he knowed hisself guiltier than me, don't it?"

"How do you know it would alarm him to discover that you were returned?"

"Well, there! didn't I see un shoot his uncle?"

"That was an accident."

"Was it? if so be 'twere accident, I never see one so intentional, that's all about that."

"Could you swear it was done purposely?"

"What's the use o' me swearing? I can't appear afore this month's up; then agin, the thing might ha' been accident for all me; 'deed I shouldn't ha' thought so much about it, only he took such pains to get shut o' me afterwards, that, being nothing much agin me but sniggerin a hare, it forced me to think he'd done it a purpose."

"Now," thought Raven, "is he undervaluing his evidence to test my interest, or is he actually indifferent to hiding here six weeks longer? That he will not run any risk without adequate compensation, and warrant of security is evident. If," he continued aloud, "you really and truly believe in your own mind, that old

Mr. Harrod was shot intentionally, and are prepared to state this when and where I shall require you to do so (remember you will not be called upon to swear to what you think, but only to what you saw) it is in my power to protect you from his revenge, and, moreover, to procure you positive redress for the injury you have already sustained at his hands."

"'Twould take a mighty large sum," cried Molly, speaking for the first time, "to do that; the devil is a hard bargainer, and no sum I can tell could wipe out Isaac's score 'cept the body and soul of him as caused Isaac to run it up."

"What guarantee can you give," asked Jack, "when I have done this job for you, that I shan't be seized as a runaway convict?"

Raven had no guarantee to offer.

"We have a kind of trust in you, Mr. Raven," added the other, "else you wouldn't ha' been here, though there ben't n'er another of your set hereaway wouldn't hang a man for poaching, as soon as he'd hang a dog. Havn't you got no security then?"

Raven considered, "none but the word of an honest man."

"I'll take it," said Jack, "because you treats me like one by the offer; and a bad un though I be, 't aint for the want of a wish to be better; give us your hand, sir. I've seen a deal o' life, and I knows 't aint no use a trusting a fellow by halves; you've pledged your honour to play me fair; when you wants me, you'll find me in the wault."

CHAPTER XX.

Raven sits in his sombre library. The eagle is perched beside him. He pushes an ancient folio from before him, and begins to muse in half-uttered sentences. "Insatiable wanters! Did your senseless fellows roast you alive, because you sold yourselves to devils, rather than endure your cravings for supernatural knowledge? Oh! if such cravings mean nothing, if despair and remorse be not seeking after peace or purity, either lost, or somewhere hidden,—if the pangs of love be aught else than the travail of unaccomplished unity,—if disordered passion be other than affections ill or undirected,—if profoundest misery bear no testimony to the existence of most exalted happiness, then, bigots were but merciful, and demons made nothing by their purchases, for the world and its contents were their's already! Who knocks?"

"He's there, sir," whispered Davy, slinking in with a cunning leer.

"Who is there?" asked Raven, abstractedly.

"Mr. Harrod, sir. Mr. Sigismond sent a note up to Darsingham this morning, so I kept on the look out, as you desired, and he has just passed through the village."

"How long since?" inquired Raven, eagerly, snatching up his hat.

"Not a quarter of an hour sir. He'd hardly get to the Priory before I could reach this."

As Raven went out, Davy said, "I hope, sir, you wont take his simple word."

"Whose simple word?" said Raven, not understanding Davy's request.

"Why, sir, Isaac's in course."

"Oh! I see. No, no! all right," rejoined Raven, pleased to think that Davy fancied the meeting of magistrates was about his own case. "I'll take care of you Davy, never fear."

Mr. Sigismond sat in an arm-chair. Mr. Harrod sat opposite on a sofa. Mr. Sigismond was pale, his hands trembled, so did his voice. Mr. Harrod seemed self-possessed. He sucked the handle of his walking-

stick, and looked through Mr. Sigismond, who could barely distinguish his figure, for it intervened between himself and the light.

"You may be quite sure," said Mr. Sigismond, "I should not ask you to change your decision, did I doubt your son's resolution not to enter into the alliance which you had intended for him; so long as that affair retained the form of an engagement, no consideration would ever have led me to interfere. But I am now convinced of his desire to marry Miss Sigismond, and I am bound in honour to confess that she is willing to accept him for a husband. Indeed, as you must be aware, it is for the sake of her feelings only, that I have ceased to oppose a match which nothing—nothing but the present circumstances could have made me consent to. Now, sir, that I have yielded my concession, I hope you will not hesitate to do the same." Mr. Harrod smiled.

"Really Mr. Sigismond," returned the other, "I ought to be highly flattered by the manner in which you seek to bring about this alliance between us! But without wishing to annoy you in any way by explaining my

objections, (they are naturally such as you would not readily enter into,) I beg to assure you my mind is quite made up, nor do I at present see the smallest likelihood of my consenting to a marriage which I disapprove of as entirely as you do."

"Mr. Harrod, that you and I have our private reasons for opposing this match is sufficiently intelligible to both of us. I have stifled my repugnance to it that I might spare my child's unhappiness; let a similar considersation weigh with you. Come, sir, let me intreat you to think of the children."

"No! if my son chooses to marry Miss Sigismond, he is of age, I cannot stop him. But I repeat to you what I have often told him, if he does so, I will disinherit him."

"Hard-hearted, relentless man! Will you enforce your selfish schemes at the cost of your son's peace—ay! though you make his nature revolt at such a parent!"

"I see not precisely by what authority you, Mr. Sigismond, pretend to judge the wisdom of my selfish schemes, as you courteously term them; but allow me to say, before I take my leave, that, according to my judg-

ment, in prescribing your conduct as a pattern for mine you have overlooked the trifling circumstance, that the change of your decision is in favor of your interests, not at all of mine. Should I consent to the match, Miss Sigismond marries a wealthy man. But, sir, and again I say I have not the smallest intention to wound your feelings, permit me to remind you that the young lady whom I am requested to accept as my daughter-in-law is not only not the heiress of your estate; but—"

"But what, sir? what?" shrieked the old man, starting to his feet, and trembling from head to foot, with rage, at the calm insulting tones of Mr. Harrod's voice."

"But, sir, not your *legitimate* daughter; —not as far as I could ever learn, entitled to the name she bears."

"Mr. Harrod," said the other, speaking with the greatest difficulty, yet assuming a dignified air which well became his venerable and now erect form "Mr. Harrod! that this estate has, within your recollection, passed to the female line is enough, in itself, to convince you that Meriel Sigismond cannot be my daughter. But, sir, to insinuate aught against one whose

purity was as spotless as this sweet child's, is to asperse innocence with calumny, and to insult with cowardice, the grey hairs of a defenceless old man."

"Well!" said Mr. Harrod, ashamed at feeling abashed, "but Miss Sigismond (you must pardon me for speaking so plainly in an affair which I really must look upon as a matter of business) Miss Sigismond will be without fortune; at least, your liberal mode of living, upon an estate which, since it joins my own, I must know is severely mortgaged, cannot have enabled you to make such provision as I consider essential for those who marry young. During my life it would be quite out of my power to make any settlement upon my son; and, in fact, unless you undertook to insure them an independence, I again tell you, I shall positively adhere to my first decision."

"Alas! five thousands pounds is the extent of what I can do. But I hoped that you—"

"If," said Harrod, "I allowed my son the interest of another five thousand, this would even be stretching a point. Were, however, this fortune, thus made up, doubled, I would not

consent. You have my answer, so there's an end of it."

"Stop!" exclaimed Mr. Sigismond, "my request to you was one no honourable man need blush to make. No parent could act otherwise than I did. But, sir, a gentleman would not have behaved as you have done. The insults you offer me are proofs only of your cowardice; and were it not that this arm is withered by age, no laws made by man should protect you from the retribution I leave perforce to a higher Power."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Harrod. "It is a pity that old age, which has robbed you of strength, should have left you so full of valorous intention. However, rest assured I will run no risk. I promise to keep out of your way; unless by-the-bye," he added, when he got to the door, "unless you should again ask me to become *father-in-law* of a young lady who, I fear, is sadly at a loss for a *father!*"

"By ——!" cried Mr. Sigismond, "your provocation is past bearing. Overwhelm her with misery, and insult both, you shall not. Harrod! I have you in my power! and by the Heaven above us! you shall be the

pleader now, or I will ruin you! Your uncle—"

"Well! what of him?"

"Died in my presence, making me the confessor of his last worldly thoughts. Do you guess them, Harrod? Yes! even your benefactor's death-struggle found another pang in the dread suspicion of your crime. He, poor man—"

"Was deceived by some devil sent to guide his departing soul to hell! I swear, by all that men hold sacred, he was deceived. I shrink not from this accursed charge. I know what you—what all who have ever heard the name of Harrod, have thought of this unlucky accident. It has been the plague-spot of my existence. But stood I now before Heaven's judgment-seat, I would answer to the charge with fearless innocence. If I had not been his nearest, his most devoted relative, none would have suspected me."

"Who is to believe you? You, Harrod, who, guilty or innocent of this crime, have practised continuous deception? You, who sneer at virtue, honour, and what you idly swear by—all that good men hold sacred?

Until this hour I have religiously abstained from passing judgment. But the badness of your heart has driven compassion and charity from mine; and although the power I have was placed in my hands as a holy trust, yet do I hold myself justified in using it to restrain your cruelty."

"Publish your own; proclaim my uncle's fancies; I care for neither; they will not ruin me."

"Nor did I threaten to ruin one so shameless by the force of shame; my power is armed with greater terrors for such as you. Ere your uncle died he made a second will; to me he gave it, with instructions to enforce his final testament whenever accident should confirm his fears."

"And though time has proved them groundless, passion and revenge at length outweigh it? Truly the trust was well reposed!"

"No! resentment of wrong, and a sense of justice may have had their influence; but an accuser, unheard by me until yesterday, has risen up against you. The words of that witness call upon me to discharge what now becomes a duty."

"Who, or what is this accuser, that dares to brand me with the crime of murder? If you think to intimidate me by trickery, old man, your devices will not serve you. I neither believe the existence of a second will, nor can there be a witness to accuse me, and to pretended powers I will not succumb, though the very life of your bastard child should hang upon the consequence."

"Wretch!" cried Mr. Sigismond, tottering towards a table of drawers, one of which he opened with trembling hands. "Here! here is my pretended power! Read with your own eyes the warrant of your ruin!" Harrod's face grew livid as he scanned the legal document; informed of its complete authority, his opponent's victory seemed inevitable, and blank despair took possession of his usually crafty mind. Suddenly, however, his features lighted up with a demoniacal grin of exultation, crumpling the paper in both hands he thrust it deliberately into the flames. Mr. Sigismond saw his movements, and the blaze which followed. He rushed towards the fire; but Harrod kept him forcibly at arm's length, holding him in this position till

the old man's cries for help brought one, amongst others, who made even Mr. Harrod stagger with dismay. Jack, following Raven, and Meriel, burst into the apartment.

"What means this conspiracy!" exclaimed the destoyer of the will."

"Your perdition," Raven calmly answered.

"Has he hurt you, dear father?" cried Meriel, clinging with terrified looks to Mr. Sigismond's arm.

"Not me, my child, 'tis you that he has harmed; but he shall not escape my vengeance."

"Say, rather, justice, sir," interposed Raven. "Here is one who has a heavy charge against him."

"Who! who!" asked Mr. Sigismond.

"Jack Sandford, the convict," replied the man himself, with defiant boldness.

"Do your worst," said Harrod, scornfully; I defy you. Store up your revenge. I take mine now," here the speaker, turning about, addressed himself to Meriel. "Miss Sigismond—for so they call you—to you I owe whatever ill betides me. But for you, the plans I formed for Fabian's welfare would, ere this, have brought honour and contentment to me

and mine; you balked me, and, to oppose the influence exercised by you upon Fabian's heart, I was driven to use deceit, to plot and counterplot for the success I had spent a life in brooding over. Day by day my fostered schemes became the tokens of my wasted care; vexation and regret usurped the place of promised triumphs, and I reaped the fruits of baffled artifice, where I might have profited by discreet solicitude. But for you, that old man would not have striven to disgrace me; but for you, Raven's money would not have hired this gaol-bird to rip up a wound which time had cauterized; and now, you, and you only, can atone for my misfortunes."

"Oh! say by what means," cried Meriel; "if you did but know how innocently I have been the cause of all you impute to me, you would not blame me with such severity."

"They who fight your battle give no quarter, therefore, ask none from me. Your sufferings must ransom mine. Learn—"

"Spare her! spare her!" cried Mr. Sigismond, "and I will spare you."

"It is too late," said Harrod. "Learn," he

pursued, still addressing Meriel, "that that old man is *not your father*."

"What!" shrieked the girl, starting from Mr. Sigismond's side.

"Were you his child, his estate had been your inheritance; my son might have been your husband. From your cradle he deceived you; deceived you to replace a daughter's loss. Yet, in him you have no father."

"He lies! he lies!" cried Mr. Sigismond, and would have darted in blind fury upon the speaker; Meriel, however, stepped between them.

"No!" she said, with solemn and stately mien, "I have heard too much—yet, not enough. Tell your story to the end, sir."

"It is told," said Harrod; "make what use of it you may." He then bowed mockingly, and left the room.

Mr. Sigismond approached Meriel; she waved him back. "I wish to be alone," she said, then slowly, but with a firm step, retired. Jack had the good taste to go too, so that Mr. Sigismond and Raven remained by themselves.

"Oh! Raven, Raven!" sobbed the old man, "why did I not listen to your advice ten years ago! My fondness has insured her misery; the more she loved me, until now, the bitterer must be her hate from this time forth."

"Wrong her no more," was Raven's grave reply. "Her nature is not less noble now than ever. Where most injured, there will she be most forgiving; where comfort is most needed, there will she bestow most love. She has a woman's nature; when the first pangs of grief are past, her own sorrow she will consign to God; other's sorrow will become her own."

"What meanwhile can be done? Who can explain to her the truth she now must wholly know?"

"Leave this to me."

"Best of friends! to you of all I would soonest trust this painful task. But tell her—I entreat you to tell—how I have erred from too much fondness, from too much care to—"

"Leave all to me. She has much to learn which none but I can tell her. Let Lady Fitzjohn propose the interview; send for me when Meriel is prepared."

CHAPTER XXI.

Not until the third day after the occurrences above related was Meriel Sigismond sufficiently recovered to listen to the disclosures which Raven had volunteered to unfold. During the intervening period the state of her health had so much affected her mind (though, perhaps, it would be more correct to attribute her illness to the shock sustained by her feelings,) that her medical adviser entertained serious apprehensions, lest the fever indicated by her pulse should finally attack the brain. All were strongly impressed with the necessity of keeping from her whatsoever might create excitement, and everyone felt considerable alarm about the effects which Raven's interview might produce. When, however, the physician became aware of the real nature of the case, he declared he thought it would be more dangerous to oppose her terrible eagerness, than to gratify it by allowing her

to hear the truth. Such then was her condition when Raven was sent for.

He found her reclining upon a sofa, and when he entered every other person left the room. She stretched out her hand, welcoming him with its gentle clasp, but she neither spoke nor smiled. Raven retained her hand in his; its dry heat scorched his very heart. He looked at her for an instant, then cast his eyes upon the ground, and, letting go her hand, passed his own across his brow. Years rolled spectre-like before him in the space of moments;—years, eventful to him before Meriel was, and all the years since. First passed they in fleeting visions, keeping a semblance of their order; then in the ghostly whirl, one more scored by pains or pleasures commanded memory; lastly comparison, confused, or startled, bound old and new together, and here was the saddest vision of them all. The defenceless babe, the prattling child—cherub-faced and ever laughing, the guileless maiden, and the loving woman, changed and ever changing till care-wrung she lay, fevered, faded, death-stamped before him. But not her stages last with first did he alone compare;

One of the countless many who, before her, had trudged this same journey, he had known; and the lots of that one and of this one bowed him down with their similitude. The other, never by him forgotten, began like a summer's morning, and ended, as this one threatened to end, like a winter's night; both, had he loved, both, he had lost.

"Come," said Meriel, softly, meaning to divert his emotion, "come, Raven, do not pity me so much; you think me altered, what does that matter now? You have a great deal to tell me, have you not? I am quite prepared, and you remember how attentively I always used to listen to your stories." She tried to force a smile.

"I must begin," said Raven, "with my own history before I speak of yours; can you put up with this, think you?"

"I have heard Mr. Sigismond say, that for some reasons, which I should never learn, you took an interest in my fate; therefore I suppose your history is in some way linked with mine. If it be so, I know you will not keep me in suspense longer than needful. Begin where you please, I promise not to interrupt you."

"Well then," resumed Raven, "I must go back a good many years. Mr. Sigismond (I dare-say you have heard him relate it,) passed one or two summers of his youth in Spain. There, I think, at Madrid, he made friends with a gentleman through whose introduction he afterwards became acquainted with the Mexican family into which he married. The name of his wife's father was Don Diego de Aquilar. Soon after his wife's death—she died giving birth to a second child; Mr. Sigismond returned to England. Becoming heir to some of Don Diego's estates, he again went back to Mexico. His daughter, now grown up, was his only companion; the other child, a boy, had lost his life by a fatal accident."

"One moment;" said Meriel, "the miniature which lies there on the table, is his likeness?"

"It is," replied Raven.

"And I called him brother," said Meriel, mournfully.

"You will presently learn, however, how nearly he was related to you. But to go on with my story,—the dilatory course of Mexican justice detained Mr. Sigismond more than a year abroad. During this period, a Spanish officer,

of high standing, and holding a staff appointment under the Spanish Crown, became passionately enamoured of Mr. Sigismond's daughter; he pressed his suit unknown to the father, was repulsed, but relinquished not the hope of ultimately succeeding. By-and-bye, Mr. Sigismond discovered his purpose, and begged him to desist from it, as his daughter's hand and affections were pledged to a young Englishman."

"What was the officer's name?" asked Meriel.

"Vasquez!" answered the narrator.

"And Miss Sigismond's lover, who was he?"

"Raven."

"Raven!" echoed Meriel.

"The same who tells the tale."

Meriel raised herself from the couch, showing signs of intense interest, mixed with almost painful astonishment. "Could Raven be her—relation!"

"Vasquez," pursued Raven, "did not desist; an opportunity presently arrived, which gave into his possession the object of his insatiable desires. Mr. Sigismond determined to leave Mexico. On his way to Vera Cruz, his carriage was attacked by a party of horsemen,

(the gang was hired,) and Vasquez, snatching off his prize, carried the unhappy girl to fastnesses, whence none could rescue her until assistance was too late."

"Poor girl!" sighed Meriel, falling back upon the pillow, quite exhausted with her previous anxiety. "And you?" she exclaimed, springing up again with the afterthought, "you, Raven! what became of you?"

"What will bear omission, but may not be repeated."

"Yes, yes!" said Meriel, "tell me all."

"God forbid! you know the outline of my story. I fought in Spain, in South America, India, where peril or death were, there I sought them; but gained little by the pursuit, as others find; for what man needs is rest, what I found was restlessness! After passing, at long intervals, a month or so with you, I came at last to Wyldeacre; once only have I been absent. My journey to Mexico and one brief page in my earlier history relate to you." He paused. "Can you bear the recital now?"

"Much easier than suspense. I beseech you! leave nothing to be told hereafter: as yet, the mystery of my parentage remains unsolved."

"Too soon, dear Meriel, will you learn how those I speak of were concerned with you. Seventeen years after the sad catastrophe, I went a third time to Mexico. This one last search I resolved to make, in memory of her I never ceased to love."

"Seventeen years!" muttered Meriel, her own age crossing her mind.

"But before," continued Raven, "I speak of the third journey, the incidents of my first must first be told. The fate of Sigismond's daughter having reached my ears, I hastened out to join my personal efforts to those which he had incited the government to make for the recovery of his child. Large sums were expended by the father to no purpose; half ruined, half broken-hearted, he left me to pursue the hunt which I, infatuated, could not relinquish. My exertions were in part rewarded. Oh, what reward! but hear it, Meriel, for you it most affects. Not a town, not a village had I left unexplored, when hopeless I came back to Vera Cruz, meaning to embark for England. It was the month of June, the deadliest season of the year. Fever raged like a plague throughout the city. For weeks before its

cursed advent thousands of graves had yawned for their annual prey. Accident led me, on the eve of embarcation, to one of these dreadful places; never shall I forget its hideous aspect. The surface everywhere was strewn with human bones, skulls, and scarce disjointed skeletons. Yet these, in all their frightfulness, were less loathsome than what else was there; bodies newly-buried had rotted through their fragile cases, and lay, protruding their putrifying members to pall every sense with creeping horror, and sickening disgust. No living friends followed thus far the dearest of the departed; either the sight was unendurable, or Death's abode amongst them, dulled their hearts to all but fear. I stood in contemplation of the scene, almost wishing to be a senseless part of it, when presently against the inner wall I perceived the sunken figure of a woman; careless of infection I approached and saw that to her breast she hugged an infant. By her frame I judged her to be dying; when nearer, the taint upon her skin, (as yet she hung her head upon the babe,) betrayed to me the nature of her malady. I spoke, she lifted up her face—Horror! Great God! What horror!—It was

your mother's. Eternal spirit! Have I doubted since the immortality of a soul, which has capacity to suffer anguish such as I have suffered!—In these arms, where she should have lived, she died. You, dear child, were consigned to me, I brought you to your grandfather, told him what I knew, and left again to learn what more I could."

"And what more did you learn?" said Meriel.

"I would have given all I possessed for her sake then, for your's now, to verify the only words she had breath to speak; she uttered a sound like 'married,' then, struggling with death, gasped, 'seek proofs of, spare *him*, for he is father to my child.' The name she gave me was that of a woman whom I since discovered to be in some way indebted to her, although that same woman had loved Vasquez, and had been by him maltreated. For some reason, I failed to discover any trace of this person, and concluded that I had misunderstood, and therefore for ever lost the clue to your legitimacy. Your grandfather, after many consultations and differences with me upon your future, decided, that as no positive proof could be produced of your parents' marriage, the ques-

tion should never be raised of your right to inherit his estates, and that you should be kept in total ignorance of the unfortunate circumstances of your origin. He argued justly, that as these circumstances were known, and would be carefully treasured in the minds of the next in succession, any attempt to constitute you as his heiress would cause them to contest your legitimacy, and by so doing reveal what, as far as your worldly prospects were concerned, there would be no need for you to learn. The only necessity there could ever be for your hearing the truth, would be one which called upon you to inherit Nordefall; and which, in that case would, at the same time, be divested of the most painful part of the revelation. Be convinced that, right or wrong in his decision, his only thought was how to save you pain."

"Never did I doubt it," cried Meriel; "my poor grandfather! little could he foresee the cruel accident which should disclose the truth, when least I was able to bear its shock. But tell me, dear Raven, did your last journey reveal nothing?"

"Yes, strange fatality! as before your mo-

ther, so this time your father died in my presence. I found the woman whom I sought as guide; she told me where to meet with him. We met, not indeed as friends; he strove to take my life, and died by his misdirected weapon."

"God have mercy on him!"

"Amen!"

"And so my last chance was for ever gone."

"I fear so."

"Well," said Meriel, "I know the worst, and shall not have to bear it long."

"Nay, there are bright days in store for you; you have lost a father, but only in name, a parent still survives; a noble fellow loves you, and you have yet one friend."

"Ah! do not mock me, the sources of life's joys are but countable; to me all are alike embittered. The melancholy duty of appearing happy, and so to comfort my grandfather, must henceforth be my constant effort. But Fabian's love fills me with sorrow; for is it not sad to be compelled to wish he may forget me? yet for his sake I must wish this. I must wish that his generous confidence be now destroyed, that his admiration may change to

cold disdain, and that he may never think of me but as one too heartless to comprehend his firm devotion. You, Raven, will befriend him, will lend him courage if he despond; when vexed with indignation, give scope to his resentment, jeer at his gloomy forethoughts; and when he harks back to sweet remembrances, as lovers ever and ever do, snatch him from that occupation, for its penalty is like its pleasure, intensest of them all. . . . . I thank you, Raven, for what you have done for me, my admiration I forbear to speak of; for I know that neither my love, my gratitude, nor my high esteem could be doubted by you, and more than this I know, that such as you work from higher motives than the world's approval. Now, God be with you; see Fabian soon, but say not how I love him."

CHAPTER XXII.

On leaving Nordefall, Raven's first object was to speak with Fabian, whom the last few days had worked into a state of mind such as he had never before experienced, and such as we venture to say he will never forget. The path Raven took led him by the village church. As he went, the tolling of the passing bell smote upon his ear, so he stopped to ask who in the parish was dead. Entering the church-yard he saw no one on this side the sacred edifice, but heard, mingled with the sounds of the bell, a very pitiable howl, which continued until he came round to the side whence it proceeded. The first figure that caught his notice was that of the Rev. Mr. Pilgrim, in the act of belabouring an urchin of about ten or twelve years old; the sexton, who leant upon his spade at the mouth of a

fresh grave, was grinning from ear to ear; towards the further corner of the yard, some half dozen boys, playmates of the captured scape-grace, were scampering away from the enraged divine as fast as the legs of Terror could carry them. "Wicked child!" exclaimed Mr. Pilgrim, abating his castigation from sheer want of breath. "Could'st thou find no other less impious amusement that thou must needs desecrate the sacred dust of this hallowed ground with Godless sport? How prone to sin must man's fallen nature be, when in his very childhood, the least guilty stage of his wicked career, he romps and plays at leaping in and out of graves, unmindful that these dreadful pits must imprison him and all his race until the day of trial before their awful Judge." With these words Mr. Pilgrim again fell to beating the poor boy, who begged and prayed for mercy in the most passionate accents. Fortunately for the lad Raven happened to be standing by, for, the instant he comprehended the nature of the offence, his protection was interposed in such a way as to give the boy an opportunity of running off. When Raven heard the grave was being dug

for old Molly Sandford, who had died that morning, he would not stop to converse with Mr. Pilgrim, but hastened on till he came into the high road. Scarcely had he walked a mile ere he fell in with another adventure, at least if the meeting with a friend not at the moment looked for, may so be called. This friend was the good Padre from Mexico, who, set down by the coach at the cross roads, was trudging along with a carpet-bag on his back in the direction of Wyldeacre. At first sight Raven did not recognise the sturdy figure of the priest, who waved his hand, and smiled as he came up with right joyful demeanour. The Padre had undergone a very marked transformation since he and Raven met in Mexico; in the place of the enormous priestly *sombrero*, extending half a yard before and behind, he wore a round broad-brimmed farmer-like hat, the serge gown was exchanged for a tight fitting single-breasted surtout, buttoned, (despite his present heat,) to the throat, his knee-breeches had grown into common trousers, and the buckled-shoe was supplanted by a pair of blucher boots. "Eh! Dio guard 'a usted!" exclaimed the Englishman; "Who had thought

to see your reverence turned layman? But, secular or divine, thrice welcome to this foreign land."

"I am disguised" said the priest, laughing; "but in this free country of yours, where you boast so loudly of toleration, you would hoot at me if I wore the badges of my calling. Well! well! the cowl makes not the monk, as the saying goes. And how has your worship fared since we parted in the other world?"

"As well as I may hope to fare when I travel from this to the next," said Raven. "Though forsooth! you find us in a peck of troubles just now."

"How so? Fortune seems to use your worship roughly; you were in no better plight when last we fell together."

"Nay, if I remember right, 'twas you who got the fall, worthy friend. Have you forgotten the roll your mule gave you when the robbers set upon us?"

"Sancta Maria! no! that was an awful business, from beginning to end. Often, after you were gone, I regretted that your sudden departure prevented me from speaking further to you on the subject, especially as

matters turned out. But here we are together again, so now I can question you touching your extraordinary behaviour on that occasion."

"I fear," said Raven, "you must be content to restrain your curiosity for half an hour or so. And do not rely too fondly on my communicativeness even then. At present I am bound upon a serious mission, which admits of no delay. As, therefore, our roads lie in contrary directions, I must leave you to follow this, while I retrace my steps. Take the first pathway on your left, cross the fields, and make for that solitary house on yon hill. Enter it, you will find everything ready for your reception. The laws of hospitality oblige me to rejoin you at my utmost speed."

Raven's approach was seen by Fabian, who had long been on the watch for him.

"Well?" cried the anxious youth, running to meet his friend, "how is it?"

Raven shook his head. "Heavy news. Expect the worst!"

"She lives?" gasped Fabian.

"Yes! yes!" replied Raven, "I hope she will recover. But, well or ill—living or dead, you *must forget her*."

"Impossible!"

"Your happiness depends on it—"

"Then I'll be miserable all my life if that's to be the price of thinking of her. You say she will recover—I am satisfied!"

"She will not marry you—"

"Never?"

"Never!"

"I'll see about that. Who's to prevent it?"

"Herself."

"Meriel? Nonsense! she will not jilt me."

"She is, however, resolved; more than this, she is willing you should think that she has ceased to care for you!"

"Come, come, you don't expect me to believe that—do you?"

"You had better believe me at once, since, sooner or later, you'll have no choice; and doubting, as you have found, is not a pleasant pastime. Look Destiny in the face, and boldly meet the fate you cannot fly from. Ten years hence your prospects may be altered; meanwhile, unless you desire to make the girl as miserable as yourself, obey her wishes and give the matter up."

"May I be —— if I do! I have never despaired yet, nor will I now. Meriel gives in because she is constrained by obedience. The same obligation does not bind me; I am in no hurry, I can wait."

"Beware!" said Raven, "that which is decreed, your obstinacy will not subvert. We often cling to a purpose because we fancied its fulfilment near; by-and-bye we discover that fancy was delusive; and at last thank Providence that it took controlment from our hands."

"What you say," returned Fabian, "may be mighty fine, but one thing I know, when noble purposes spur the game, and virtue is the stake we play for, a deal more care and trouble come of weak inconstancy than ever come of steadfast perseverance. God forbid I should conceive an impious desire, or think to set my impotent will against heaven's decree. The impulses I obey are such as my conscience approves; I don't pretend to be better than others, but if I weren't in love I should certainly be worse; so the long and the short of the matter is, I mean to stick to it—yes! though, old fellow, I wait ten or twice ten years."

Raven looked at his young friend with a mixture of admiration and compassion. He said no more to dissuade Fabian from what he regarded as the headstrong impetuosity of youth. Informing him, however, that the Padre had arrived, they went on and joined the priest at Wyldeacre.

On reaching the house, both Raven and Fabian were detained some minutes at the doorway, and notwithstanding the earnest conversation just held, their merriment was irresistibly provoked by listening to a dialogue between the Padre and Mrs. Dolphin. The latter, to make herself intelligible, was combining with her usual flowery language, a flood of broken English, which probably she conceived to be Anglo-Spanish; at least it was her best imitation of the Padre's own dialect, and so successfully did she match him, that, as he spoke what was quite incomprehensible to her, so she in return used expressions of which he understood not a word.

At any other time we should have transcribed this conversation for the reader's entertainment, but for Meriel's sake and for your sake, my dear young lady, who are now dying for the termination of this chapter, we

hasten on without another break to the conclusion of our story. Please then imagine Mrs. Dolphin set aside, the Padre and Fabian to have got over the first explosion of mutual welcomes, and Raven with his two friends to be already engrossed in the Mexican adventure. We will take up the conversation where it begins to be interesting.

"To be frank with you, Padre Mio," said Raven, "it is impossible for me to answer any more of your questions upon this subject. It is fraught with many painful recollections, and even Fabian must wish no further mention to be made of that unfortunate man."

"My good friend," returned the Padre, "it would much grieve me to think I have come thus far only to annoy you. But, strange as it may appear, the more reserved you are upon this subject, the more reason have I to probe your motives for secrecy. Since, however, I might be labouring under some egregious error, it is incumbent upon me to offer an excuse for my importunacy. Up till now you have repulsed my inquiries, mistaking my interest for mere curiosity. The fact of my being a witness to your singular behaviour,

was enough you thought, to account for any degree of curiosity in me, or in any person who might have seen what I saw. In this you overlooked the circumstance of my profession, forgetting that a Catholic missionary passes by force a life of comprehensive experience —a life that reveals to him humanity in many phases. But his profession enjoins the secrecy which long training enables him to practice. I need not tell you, the most secret are generally the least curious. Another mistake of yours was, you formed your opinion of me at our first meeting. I detected the elements of a bold and self-relying nature in you, and knew, that with all your penetration, you sometimes formed hasty conclusions. You were wrong in this instance as you would be in most similar ones. Now my interest about your connection with Vasquez does not spring from mere curiosity. I know something about Vasquez's story."

"You!" exclaimed Raven. "Why the first question I asked when first we met was how long you had been in Mexico. You answered about ten years; from this reply I inferred your ignorance of my designs."

"You were wrong," renewed the priest, "for this much I knew of Vasquez, that he ran away with an English girl who was reported to have been engaged to a countryman of her own. I know that he married that girl."

"You know that he married her?" cried Raven and Fabian, in a breath.

"Yes; and now I know," added the priest, "what I before suspected, that you, my friend Raven, are connected with that unhappy tragedy."

"Well!" said Raven, "Truth is stranger than fiction. But, really, you drop in upon us exactly at the right moment, like a character in a novel, to solve the point on which the happiness of both hero and heroine depend."

"Yet, there is nothing so wonderful in my playing this part neither, for your investigation led to our acquaintance. What seems more remarkable to me is, that you should three times cross the Atlantic in search of a particular person and not once breathe his name to the clergyman of the district, where he was supposed most frequently to visit."

"My dear friend," said Raven, "you forget

how, beside the questions I put concerning the length of your residence in the country, I sounded you touching the robbers who infested it. Your replies, indeed your whole manner misled me, and induced me to discourse on other subjects. After the death of Vasquez, I gave up the hope of obtaining proofs of his marriage, and abruptly left you to catch the steamer just then sailing for England."

"And in those searches, which you so diligently made, did it never occur to you to seek the priest who married Vasquez?"

"Whither was I to seek him? The first time I followed the only direction given me not a trace of the only person who was to have been my guide could I discover. I therefore imagined the address to be a wrong one. Years after, I made a second trial. This time success attended me. I met both Vasquez and yourself the very day after I had received instructions. Now tell me, what evidence you can possibly have of this marriage?"

"The best in the world. The priest who performed the ceremony was my predecessor. I knew him intimately. He told me of the

circumstance, and still lives to prove it by his reverend word."

"Where is he?"

"In Spain. He is one of the first friends I intend to visit."

"You are certain of what you state?"

"Most positive! and in less than three months from this date, all the evidence which your English law requires can be procured."

"Then," said Raven, turning to Fabian, "I wish you joy with all my heart; for when this point is settled, Meriel becomes the legitimate heiress of Nordefall. And unless I am vastly deceived in your father, he will readily accede to your desires."

"How about her?" said Fabian. "I thought you said just now she had determined never to marry me."

"What! do you doubt her good will, all obstacles being removed?"

"No—by Jove!—and never did." Upon this Fabian seized the Padre round the waist, and declaring he was the greatest trump in the universe, began to dance a polka with him to such a very boisterous measure that the excel-

lent-hearted but unctuous priest was mightily pleased to escape from the rude embrace of our youthful Hercules. Seeing this display of uncontrollable spirit follow the intense anxiety he had before observed on Fabian's countenance, Father Urban began to inquire, the instant he recovered breath, how the circumstances just revealed happened to affect him. Fabian, who was too much elated to prose over a tedious story, referred the Padre to his friend. Raven, therefore, explained as briefly as he was able, the leading features of the story, in which, from beginning to end, the hearty priest manifested the deepest interest. When he had heard the whole, he expressed a strong desire to become acquainted with Meriel. "For," said he, "though necessarily a stranger myself to the tender passion—" (here both Raven and Fabian suppressed a smile) "I have a sublime admiration for those beautiful qualities in the female character which, while they exhibit the most devoted affection, can yet endure as much for duty as for love."

"Bravo!" cried Fabian; "I warrant your reverence can preach an out-and-out sermon. As for Meriel, she is all you think of her and a

good deal more. I'll introduce you, and will answer for't you'll be as pleased with her acquaintance as she with yours."

A long consultation now followed concerning the best measures to be adopted for announcing the Padre's disclosure. Fabian was for starting off that minute to share his happiness with his darling Meriel. Both the elder counsellors, however, objected to this step as decidedly premature. At length it was unanimously agreed that the effect of the intelligence should be first tried upon Mr. Harrod; his pleasure being ascertained, the matter might be gently broken to Meriel, either through the mediation of her grandfather, or through Lady Fitzjohn.

The humanest reader that ever perused romance could not wish a more favorable issue to these events than it is our good fortune to record. Mr. Harrod, partly pleased to avail himself of means to appease his threatening adversaries, and perfectly satisfied that the Nordefall estate would exceed, in point of fortune, any sum Sir Foy Derisley could settle upon his daughter, promised in the most amiable manner to withdraw every opposition

directly the proofs of Miss Sigismond's legitimacy were thoroughly established.

What passed between Meriel and her lover at their first or at any subsequent meetings is beyond the power of art to describe. These meetings, limited at the outset, now and then gradually got to be every other day; and long before the desired proofs turned up, Meriel and Fabian were seen in each other's company, from morning to night, every day in the week.

The proofs came. Then the news of the engagement spread through the country, congratulations poured in from all sides. The family attorney wrote to the supposed heir-at-law. The marriage-settlements were drawn up, the *trousseau* completed, the day fixed, the parson engaged, the bridal dress sent home, the ring in Fabian's pocket, the cake all sugared, the bell-ringers ready to get tipsy—

(Does thy heart beat, sweet reader, lest all this should be the prelude, as thou mayst, perchance, have seen it (in novels), to some fell catastrophe?) when, on the morning appointed for the wedding, Mr. Sigismond led Raven aside, and said to him in a gloomy voice,

"Forty long years ago I witnessed the rehearsal of this scene, myself a happy actor in the play, just as their hearts now overflow with joy, so mine on that bright morning beat with almost painful ecstasy. I stood where Meriel stands, beneath that old cracked picture of the flaming Priory, and 'midst my too delicious fancies heard my mother sigh, an aged friend was by her, to him she said, 'He, too, my happy boy, must one day feel the dreadful curse.'"

Raven took the old man gently by the hand. "I did not know, sir," he said, "how deeply you were impressed by this mysterious legend, which a strange course of accidents has seemed to stamp with supernatural consistency. For my own part I have ever believed that the custom is to strain reality in such cases to meet improbable conditions, and this I set down to a secret inclination inherent in our nature to admit at any cost whatever evidences another state. You, however, have too sufficient reasons for your own opinion. But, be the curse prophetic, as you think, its agency is ended; for now its terms are perfectly fulfilled."

"Fulfilled? Impossible!" cried Mr. Sigismond.

"Yes," returned Raven. "In my scepticism I might have caused it otherwise. But though I saved, for a time, your daughter's husband from an ignominious end, I have since learnt from Father Urban that after my departure the body of Vasquez was exhumed and hanged upon a jibbet to rot in chains."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed the other. "And Meriel, his child, escapes the prior's curse."

* * * * *

Reader, do you care enough about any of the other men and women who have figured as the accessories of our tale, to trouble yourself with the persusal of one more page solely relating to them? If you do not, pray close the book here. But if you do, be it known unto you that, one and all, they continued in pretty nearly the same course in which we found them. Mark Sandford soon got back to his former place. His brother Jack was made keeper in his stead. Isaac became a London footman. And Mrs. Sandford ceased to be

jealous of Meriel; since this sweet creature directed her instinctive love of children to her own, which, quite independent of her prejudice, were the loveliest ever seen. Davy continued to flirt with Mrs. Dolphin, receiving always in return unlimited suppers and teas as the sweet pledges of his mistress's affection. Miss Belinda also continued to be a flirt. But, unlike Davy, though very like herself, her capacious heart found room for many lovers; and, again unlike Davy, but like all her class in the matter of return, she lived and loved, yet none loved her again. To be sure honest Small did twice offer his honest heart and hand, but Belinda rejected him without regret, nor felt a pang until the poor curate became a wealthy vicar in Pilgrim's vacated place. Then, when Small appeared a "rising man," when his active benevolence made him the talk and admiration of the neighbourhood, Miss Belinda, no longer young, pitied not Small, but herself very much. Sir Foy rode his rocking-horse to within a week or so of his death. 'Twas apoplexy made Lady Derisley a widow, but though she had long looked

for this event, alas it did not make her happy when it came. There was still a something wanting,—something she continued to seek for in this world, and which, in consequence, to the last she failed to find. As soon as Allan came into the property he took to living at Paris. He there happened to lose his fortune behind the scenes of a theatre.

Lord Granstein, whom 'tis somewhat late to speak of, did not die of chagrin, nor did he even blow his brains out. He was very disconsolate for six months, but, despite his loss, none were heartier in their good wishes than he; and of all her friends not one gave Meriel so handsome a wedding-present, nor one a gift she valued more for the giver's sake, than his. Of our philosophers but a word—Lapwing was ever on the point of flying, Beschafenheit ever lecturing on his failures. With these our business ends.

If thou, good reader, hast been so entertained with the performance of our puppets as to forget but for a moment thine own perplexities, the first aim of a novel has been hit. If, beside this, thou hast derived but a parti-

cle of wisdom, which is only otherwise to be got through that rougher teacher, Experience, a still higher purpose is fulfilled. But should neither of these objects be attained, wouldst thou but pardon me for missing them, thou wilt still have practised thy good nature, and we may part as friends, though before we were never made acquainted.

THE END.

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